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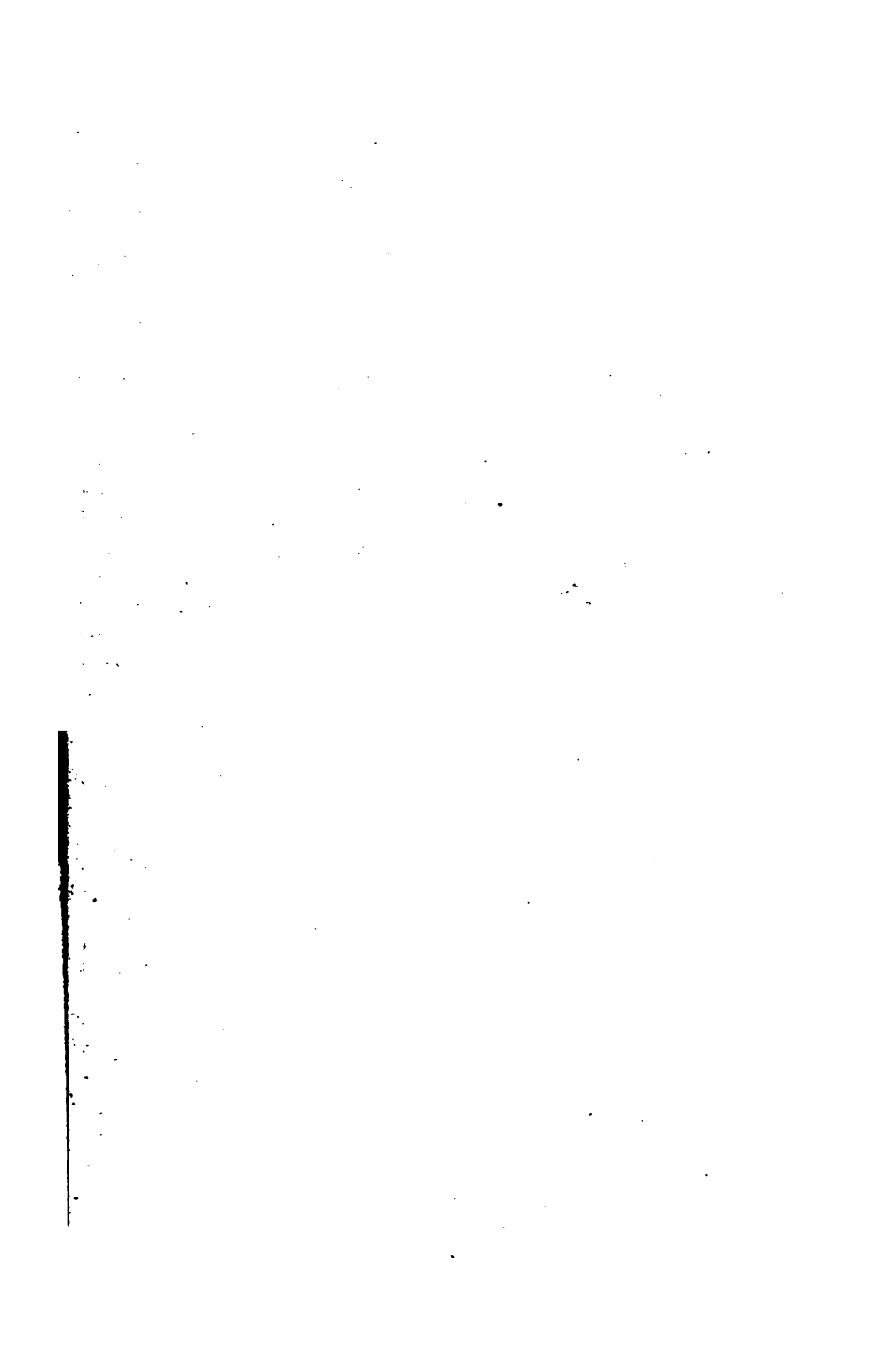
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AN ESSAY
ON
THE GROUND OR FORMAL REASON
OF
SAVING FAITH.

BY THE
REV. THOMAS HALYBURTON,
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
TWO ESSAYS, BY THE SAME AUTHOR,
ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE SUBJECT OF JUSTIFICATION,

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1714.

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PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION.

IN an age when the foundations of our faith are endangered by vague and inaccurate notions of Inspiration, it is of the utmost importance, that the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures should be vindicated, and firmly established on its proper basis. For this purpose, the writings of eminent men who have, in their own experience, successfully contended with temptations to infidelity, are highly valuable. Among these, as is well known, Professor Halyburton holds a distinguished place. His "Reason of Faith," has been pronounced by some of the most competent judges,* to be equal, if not superior, to any other treatise on the same subject, in our language: and the two shorter Essays, especially the last, will be read with deep interest, by those who are desirous of attaining a well-grounded assurance of their own interest in the blessed life to come.

That great and good man was early removed from

* Dr Chalmers and Principal Cunningham.

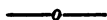
the church on earth, to higher service above. Had he lived to prepare the following Essays for the press, they would have appeared to much greater advantage. For, on comparing them with his inimitable sermons, it is evident that they were first thoughts, chiefly put down as they occurred at the time of writing ; although the subject had been fully matured in his own mind. For this reason, the Editor has judged it necessary to deal with them as with manuscripts : observing, however, the strictest fidelity to the works of so illustrious an Author ; and having no other aim but to bring out his meaning as distinctly, and as much in his own words, as possible.

R. B.

ROCKHAVEN, 23d March 1865.



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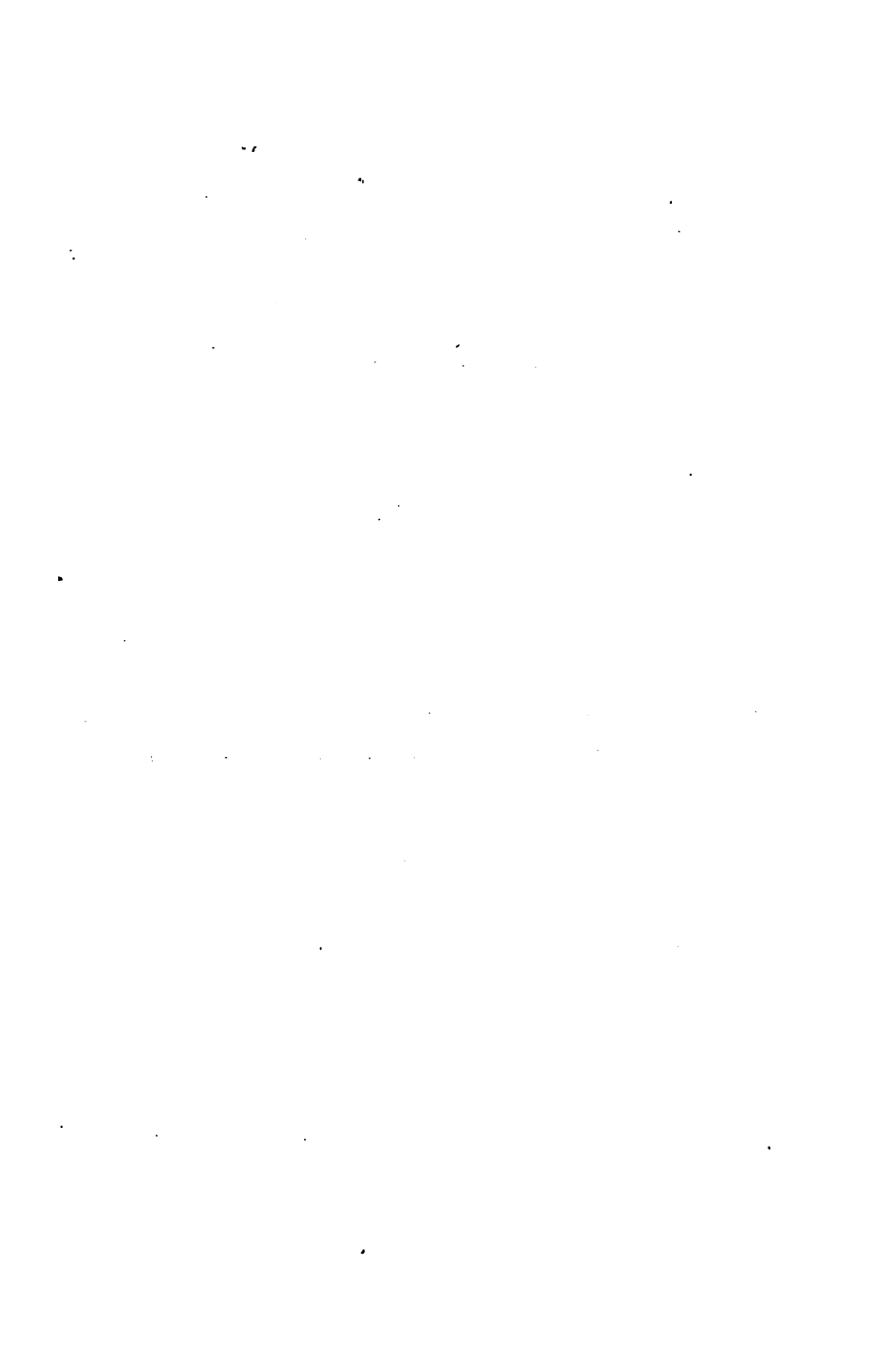
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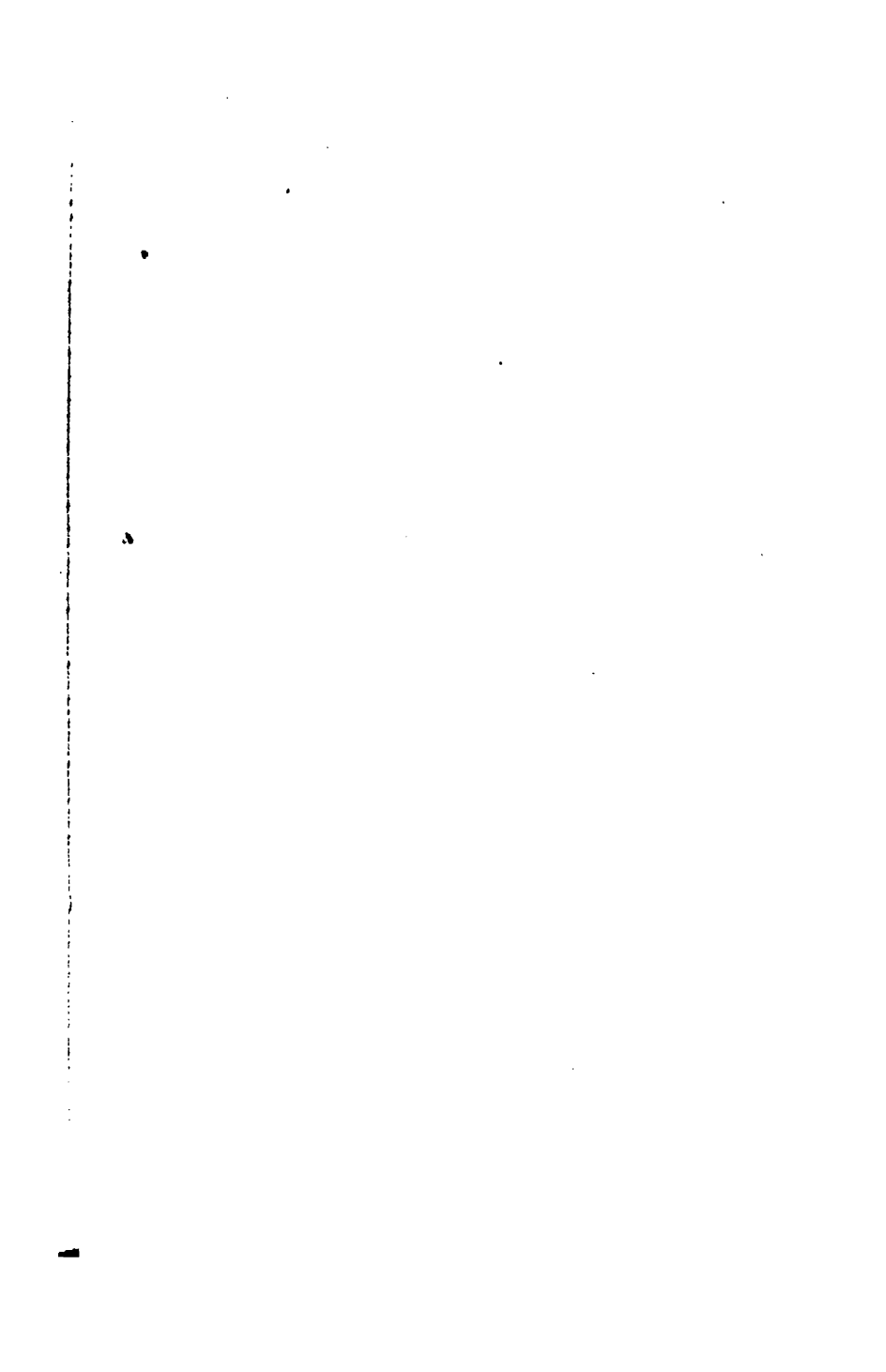
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ESSAY I.

ON THE GROUND OR REASON OF FAITH.



CHAPTER I.

GENERAL REMARKS CONCERNING KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, AND PARTICULARLY DIVINE FAITH.

ALL knowledge is commonly, and not unfitly, referred to the understanding, or intellective power of the mind of man which is conversant about truth. The foundation of our assent to any truth, is either the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of our ideas, which is called intuitive knowledge; or the comparison of our ideas with intermediate ideas which assist us in discerning their agreement or disagreement, which is rational knowledge; or the information of our senses, which is sensible knowledge; or the testimony of credible witnesses, which is faith.

Faith again, if it be founded on the testimony of men, may be called human; if upon the testimony of angels, angelical; and if upon the testimony of God himself, it is called divine faith. It is of this last that we design to discourse, as that which particularly belongs to our present purpose.

When we speak of divine faith, we mean either the faculty or power whereby we assent unto divine testimony, or the assent given by that power. Both are signified by that name, and the term faith is promiscuously used for either of them.

Again, faith, as it denotes the faculty, power, or ability of the mind, to perceive the evidence of divine testimony, and assent to it, is either natural or supernatural. That naturally we have a faculty capable of assenting, in some sort, to divine testimony, is, so far as I know, denied by none. But that ability whereby we are, at least habitually, fitted, disposed, and enabled, to assent in a due manner to the testimony of God, and to receive it with just regard, no man hath by nature ; it is a supernatural gift.

Concerning this ability, several questions are moved, into which neither my subject nor my inclination lead me to dip much at present. I shall only make the few following remarks :—

1. It is plain that God revealed himself to man in the state of innocence, and that he made man capable of converse with himself ; wherefore it seems unquestionably clear, that man originally had a power, ability, or faculty, capable of perceiving, discerning, and assenting to divine revelations, upon their proper evidence. For if such a faculty had been wanting, he had neither been capable of those revelations, nor fitted for converse with God.

2. It may be demonstrated, that all our faculties have suffered a dreadful shock, and have been mightily

impaired, by the entrance of sin, and the consequent corruption of our nature ; and, in particular, that our understandings are so far disabled, especially in things pertaining to God, that unless our natures be supernaturally renewed, we cannot, in a due manner, perceive, discern, or entertain divine revelations, upon their proper evidence, to the glory of God, and our own advantage. But although the faculty of assenting to divine testimony is impaired, and rendered unfit for performing its proper work in a due manner, it is by no means quite lost. I know of no one who asserts that any of our faculties was entirely lost by the fall. In regeneration, they are renewed ; but no promise is made of implanting new ones. It is certain that unrenewed men, such as Balaam and others, had revelations made to them, and did assent to those revelations ; and it is not less clear that the devils themselves believe, and tremble.*

3. Whether men in a state of nature, whose minds are not renewed, may not so far discern and be affected by the characters and evidences of God impressed upon divine revelations, (particularly the Scriptures, where those evidences shine brightly), as to give some sort of assent to the testimony of God, I shall not positively determine, although the affirma-

* "We cannot conceive how reason should be prejudiced by the advancement of the rational faculties of our souls, with respect unto their exercise toward their proper objects ; which is all we assign to the work of the Holy Spirit in this matter."
—*Dr Owen on the Spirit*, preface, page 9.

tive seems probable to me. The impress of a Deity is no less evident on the Scriptures than on His other works. He has magnified his word above all his name, Psalm cxxxviii. 2. Besides, I do not see how the faculty itself can remain, if it be not capable of discerning anything of God, where he gives the most full and convincing evidence of himself, as he unquestionably doth in the Scriptures. Nor do I doubt, but that multitudes of sober persons, trained up within the Church, and thereby drawn to a more attentive and less prejudiced perusal of the Scriptures, do, upon various occasions, even while they remain strangers to the work of renovation, find their minds affected by the evidence of God in them, and are thereby drawn to assent to them as his word, although not in a due manner. And if it be so, it will certainly leave the rejecters of the Scriptures altogether without excuse.

4. Whether some transient act of the Spirit of God upon the mind, be always necessary to draw forth such an assent as I have described, I shall not determine. That it is so in some cases, is not to be doubted. The faith of temporary believers doth undoubtedly require such an act as its cause; and where any degree of this evidence affects the minds of persons deeply prejudiced, (as they were who were sent to apprehend Christ, and returned under a conviction that never man spake as he did), there such a transient work of the Spirit of God seems necessary, to clear their minds of prejudices, and cause them to discern the evidences of a Deity.

5. Now, understanding by the term faith, the faculty or power of believing, (which is nothing else but the mind of man considered as a subject capable of assenting to testimony), and granting that faith, as so defined, still remains ; and that, although wofully impaired, weakened, and disabled, it continues in so far able for its proper office and work, that either by a more sedate, sober, and less prejudiced attention, or by the assistance of some transient act of the Spirit of God, breaking, in some measure, the power of its prejudices, and fixing it to the consideration of its proper object, it may, though less perfectly, perceive the impress and evidence of God in the revelation which he has made of himself ; and that thereon it may be so affected, as to give some sort of assent, and reach some conviction that it is God who speaketh : granting all this, it will amount to no great matter ; since it is certain that it is not every kind of faith or assent to divine testimony, that will answer our duty, obtain acceptance with God, and turn to our salvation.

As we are not much concerned to inquire into the faith which fails of answering those ends, I shall dip no further into questions regarding it, or our ability for it ; but shall proceed, in the next chapter, to discourse at more length, of the nature and origin of that faith which God requires us to give to his word, which he will accept, and which therefore will secure our salvation.

CHAPTER II.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF THAT FAITH WHICH WE ARE OBLIGED TO GIVE TO THE WORD OF GOD; OUR OBLIGATION THERETO, AND OUR ABILITY FOR ANSWERING OUR DUTY.

WE have already hinted, what, of itself, is sufficiently evident, that it is not every kind of faith or assent to divine testimony that will answer our duty, and amount to that regard which we owe to the truth and authority of God, when he speaks or writes his mind to us. We must therefore, in the first place, inquire into the nature of that faith which will do so; and there is no better way of making this inquiry, than by attending to the plain accounts given of it in Scripture.

1. The apostle Paul, commending the Thessalonians, and blessing God on their behalf (1 Thess. ii. 13), gives a clear description of the faith which is due to the word of God: "For this cause," says he, "thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God; which effectually worketh

also in you that believe." If we attend to this description, we cannot but see these things in it: First, that some special sort of assent is here intended. The Thessalonians did not think it enough to give such credit, or yield such assent, as is due to the word of men, even the best of men. Secondly, that such assent is intended as doth, in some way, answer the unquestionable firmness of the ground whereon it leans, which is the testimony of the God of truth. Thirdly, that somewhat more is intended than a mere assent, of what sort soever it be. The words plainly import such an assent to the word of God, or such a reception of it, as is attended with the reverence, submission of soul, resignation of will, and subjection of conscience, which are due to God. Less than this, would scarcely have been a sufficient ground for the apostle's giving thanks to God, and that without ceasing. The same expression, in other places of Scripture, imports not only an assent to the word of God, but an approbation of it, consenting to its terms, yea, embracing the gospel in practice. See Acts viii. 14, and xi. 1.

2. In Hebrews xi. 1, we are told that faith is the evidence of things not seen. The word ΕΛΕΓΧΟΣ, which we render evidence, properly signifies a convincing demonstration, standing firm against objections, and repelling their force. Faith, then, is such an assent as this. It is a firm conviction, resting upon the most solid foundation, and able to withstand the strongest objections.

3. In 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5, the apostle more particularly describes, both negatively and positively, the ground whereon faith rests; or what the demonstrative evidence is, whereon this conviction is founded. It standeth not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God; that is, it resteth not upon the eloquence or the reasonings of men, but upon the powerful evidence of the Spirit's demonstration.

Having given this short and plain account of faith from the Scripture, we are now to prove that we are in duty bound to receive the word of God, with a faith of this sort. Nor will this be difficult; for,

1. The Scriptures claim to be the oracles of God; spoken by holy men of God, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and written by divine inspiration. By them the Holy Ghost is said to speak unto us. Now the very light of nature teacheth us, that when God uttereth oracles, when he speaketh and writeth his mind to us, we are in duty bound to give entire credit to the speaker, to rely with the firmest confidence on his veracity, and to give a ready assent to what he says; and farther, to attend, with the deepest veneration, reverence, and subjection of soul, to what is spoken, and to yield an unreserved practical compliance with every intimation of his mind.

2. The Scriptures were written, that we might so believe them as to have life by them, John xx. 31. And the gospel is made known, by the Scriptures of the prophets, to all nations, for the obedience of faith,

according to the commandment of the everlasting God, Rom. xvi. 25, 26. Certainly then, we are in duty obliged to yield this obedience of faith.

3. They who do not thus receive the words of God from his servants, whether by speech or writing, are threatened with eternal ruin, and that of the most intolerable kind : "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words ; when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city," Mat. x. 14, 15. Accordingly, the apostles preached the word at Antioch in Pisidia, Acts xiii., demanded acceptance of it both from Jews and Gentiles, and, upon their refusal, testified against them in this way of the Lord's appointment: "they shook off the dust of their feet against them," verse 51. And all this severity they used, without offering miracles, so far as we can learn, or any other proof of their doctrine, besides the authoritative proposal of it in the name of God.

4. In 1 Thess. ii. 13 (already quoted), the Thessalonians are commended by the apostle for receiving the word in this manner ; which is proof enough that it was their duty so to do.

Thus much being clear, it yet remains to be inquired, whence we have the power or ability to yield such an assent ; whether that power is natural or supernatural. Now, if we consult the Scripture on this point, we learn,

1. That this ability to believe and receive the things of God, to his glory and our own salvation, is expressly denied to unrenewed man, or man in his natural estate. 2 Thess. iii. 2, "All men have not faith." 1 Cor. ii. 14, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." John viii. 47, "Ye therefore hear not God's words, because ye are not of God."

2. This ability is expressly denied to be of ourselves, and asserted to be a supernatural gift of God. Eph. ii. 8, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

3. The production of it is expressly ascribed unto God. He it is that fulfils, in his people, "all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power," 2 Thess. i. 11. He it is that giveth them, that is, that enableth them, "both to believe on him, and to suffer for his sake," Philip. i. 29. Faith is one of the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22; and the author of it is Christ, Heb. xii. 2. For the further proof and vindication of this truth, I refer to the controversial writers.

Here it may be inquired, How can it be our duty thus to believe the Scriptures, since we are not able, of ourselves, to do so? In answer to this, I shall only say, 1. We are unable of ourselves to yield perfect obedience to the divine law; yet the very light of nature shews that it is our duty. 2. The Scriptures

plainly require us to serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear ; and tell us, in the same breath, that we must have grace to enable us to do so, Heb. xii. 28. 3. By our own sin, we have impaired the powers which God originally gave us, and have brought ourselves under innumerable prejudices, and other evils, whereby the entrance of light is obstructed ; but this cannot be pleaded against God's undoubted right to demand credit to his word, on which he has impressed sufficient objective evidence of himself. 4. Our duty therefore is, to blame ourselves, to justify God, and to wait upon him, in the way which he has prescribed, for the grace that is necessary. If we thus do his will, or at least aim at it, although we cannot yet claim grace as our due, we have no reason to despair ; but may expect to be enabled, in due time, to understand and know whether those truths are of God or of men. See John vii. 17.

From what has been discoursed, it is evident that the faith whereby we assent to the Scripture, is supernatural ; or may be so called upon a twofold account : 1st, Because the power or ability for the exercise of it is supernaturally given ; and 2d, Because the evidence whereon it rests is supernatural.

In this chapter, it is the first of these that we have directly attempted to prove ; namely, that our ability thus to believe is supernaturally given. That this has been the constant doctrine of the Church of God, might be confirmed by testimonies of all sorts, did

our intended brevity allow. It is, however, resolutely opposed by our modern rationalists. The author of a late atheistical pamphlet,* which truly subverts all religion, may be allowed to speak for the rest ; for he says no more than what they all do assent to. He tells us, "That when once the mystery of Christ Jesus was revealed, even human reason was able to behold and confess it ; not that grace had altered the eyesight of reason, but that it had drawn the object nearer to it." To the same purpose speak the Socinians. Schlichtingius tells us, that "Man, endued with understanding, is no otherwise blind in divine mysteries, than as he who hath eyes but sits in the dark. Remove the darkness, and bring him a light, and he will see. The eyes of a man are his understanding ; the light is Christ's doctrine." To the same purpose doth the paradoxical Belgic exercitator, who sets up philosophy as the interpreter of Scripture, frequently express himself. Nor is his pretended answerer, Volzogius, differently minded, though he is not so constant to his opinion as the other.

But whatever these gentlemen may say, we are not obliged to believe them in this matter ; while the Scriptures plainly teach us that our minds are blinded, our understandings impaired and obstructed, in discerning the evidence of truth, by prejudices arising from the enmity of the will, and the depravity of the affections. Nor were it difficult to demonstrate from

* Treatise of Human Reason, page 58.

Scripture, that no man can believe the word of God aright, or even understand it aright, until the Spirit of God repair this defect of the faculty, or give us an understanding, as 1 John v. 20 ; break the power of the enmity in our hearts, that rises up against the truths of God, as foolishness ; cure the disorder of our affections, that blinds our minds ; and fix our minds, otherwise vain and unstable, to attend to the voice of God, and the evidence he gives of himself. But this not being our principal design, we shall insist upon it no longer. Our present question is not about our ability or power to believe, but about the ground whereon we do believe. What has been hitherto spoken of the former, is only to prepare the way for the consideration of the latter ; to which we now proceed.

CHAPTER III.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE GROUND, OR FORMAL REASON, WHEREON FAITH ASSENTS TO THE SCRIPTURES; IN WHICH THE OPINION OF THE RATIONALISTS, PARTICULARLY AS IT IS STATED BY MR LOCKE IN HIS BOOK ON THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, IS PROPOSED AND CONSIDERED.

ALTHOUGH, in the preceding chapter, we have offered our thoughts on what goes under the name of subjective light, yet that is not the question mainly intended in these papers. That which we design more particularly to inquire into, is the ground whereon the mind, thus subjectively enlightened by the Spirit of God, builds its assent, and acquiesces, or rests, with full satisfaction.

The question then before us is this: What is the ground whereon we receive the Scriptures as the word of God? Or what is the reason that moves and determines us to receive the Scriptures as the word of God? What is the formal reason whereon our faith rests? Or what is the proper answer to this question, Wherefore do ye believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, and receive truths therein proposed, as the word of God?

By all who believe the Scriptures to be a divine revelation, it is acknowledged, in general terms, that the ground whereon we receive and assent to propositions of truth therein revealed, is the authority and veracity of God ; who, being truth itself, can neither deceive nor be deceived.

But this general answer satisfies not the question. For, though it is naturally and unquestionably evident, that God's testimony is, and cannot but be, true, and, as such, must be received ; yet it is certain that the ground of our assent unto any particular truth cannot be divine testimony abstractly considered, but divine testimony evidencing itself, or as it gives evidence of itself, to the mind. The knot of the question then lies here : What is that evidence that it is God who speaketh, or giveth testimony to truths supernaturally revealed, whereby the mind is satisfied that he is the revealer ?

Now, whereas there are three different circumstances in which persons may be called to assent to divine revelation, the question proposed may be considered with respect to each of them.

1. As to the prophets or others, to whom the Scripture revelations were originally made, it may be inquired : When God revealed his mind to them, what was that evidence, what were those *TEKMHPIA*, or certain signs, whereby they were infallibly assured that the propositions which were impressed upon their minds, were from God ?

2. As to those persons to whom the former did

communicate these truths immediately, it may be inquired, By what evidence were they moved to assent and give credit to them, as divine revelations ?

3. Whereas we who now live, neither received these truths ourselves by immediate revelation, nor heard them from those persons who did, but have them collected together in the Bible, and offered to us as a divine revelation ; and whereas we are, on pain of God's displeasure in case of refusal, required to believe and assent to whatever is therein revealed, as the word of God ; it is inquired, What evidence does that book give, that it is of God ? or on what grounds may we be fully assured that it is so ?

1. So far as the question concerns the first sort of persons, I shall not dip much into it. I shall only say, in the words of the judicious and learned Dr Owen, "In the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and his actings of the minds of holy men of old, he gave them infallible assurance that it was himself alone by whom they were acted, Jer. xxiii. 28. If any shall ask, by what infallible tokens they might know assuredly the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and be satisfied, with such a persuasion as was not liable to mistake, that they were not imposed upon ; I must say plainly, that I cannot tell : for these are things whereof we have no experience." *

There is, however, one thing dropped as to this matter, by the ingenious Mr Locke, which deserves

* Owen on the Spirit, book ii. chap. i. sect. x.

some animadversion.* Though he delivers nothing positively, about the evidences which the prophets had, yet he tells us negatively, that their assurance did not arise, solely at least, from the revelations themselves, or the operation of the Spirit impressing them upon their minds ; which he calls the internal light of assurance : but that besides this, to satisfy them fully that those impressions were from God, external signs were requisite. This he endeavours to prove from their desiring confirmatory signs, as Abraham and others did ; and from God's giving such signs undesired. To this purpose he notices God's appearance to Moses in the bush.

As to the opinion itself, I look upon it as highly injurious to the honour of divine revelation ; and the grounds whereon it is founded, I take to be weak and inconclusive. For, 1. It is impossible to prove, that these divinely inspired persons always required or obtained such confirmatory signs, extrinsecal to the revelation or inspiration itself ; yea, it is manifest, that for the most part they neither received nor sought them. 2. When they *were* sought or obtained, it cannot be proved that they were necessary for the full satisfaction of those who received them, to convince them that he who was dealing with them, and revealing himself to them, was God : as if (to use Mr Locke's own words) the "internal light of assurance," while it abode, were not sufficient for that purpose.

* Locke on the Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xix. sect. xv.

It is plain that other reasons may be assigned. When the matters revealed to them related to things at a distance, which could not be effected without extraordinary outgoings of divine power, they desired, and God condescended to grant, some such extraordinary signs: not for the purpose of assuring them that he was the speaker, but to strengthen their convictions of the sufficiency of his power to perform, in defiance of the greatest opposition, what he had promised; or to enable them to do what he had required of them, how difficult soever it might be. Sometimes divine revelations were promises of things at a distance, which were not to be actually accomplished, till after a long tract of time, and over many intervenient obstacles. In that case, they were obliged to believe those promises, and wait in the faith of them, even when the light which first assured them was gone: and such evidences or signs might strengthen their adherence to the assent formerly given, upon the supernatural evidence which accompanied the revelation itself. These reasons, and others of a like nature, may sufficiently account, both for their desiring such signs, and for God's giving them. But, as we have already said, we design not a full determination of this question. We shall therefore consider the question, only with respect to the last two sorts of persons.

2. As to those who received revealed truths immediately from inspired persons: our rational divines seem to be positive, that the evidence whereon these inspired persons required assent to what they delivered

as the mind of God, consisted in, or did result from, the miracles which they wrought ; with other external signs or proofs which they gave of their mission from God. Monsieur le Clerc, in his "Emendations and Additions" to Hammond on the New Testament, gives us this gloss on 1 Cor. ii. 5, "Paul," says he, would "have the Corinthians believe him, not as a philosopher proposing probabilities to them, but as the messenger of God, who had received commandment from him to deliver to them those truths which he preached ; and that he thus received them, he did shew by the miracles which he wrought." And a little after, he adds, "He whose faith leans upon miracles wrought by God's power, his faith is grounded upon the divine power, the cause of those miracles." As to this opinion itself, I shall express myself more particularly just now ; but as to what M. le Clerc deduces from this text, he had no manner of ground for it. In the preceding verse the apostle tells the Corinthians, that in his preaching he avoided the enticing words of man's wisdom, and delivered his message in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power ; immediately adding, that his design in so doing was, that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God ; that is, in the powerful demonstration of the Spirit of God. How M. le Clerc came to dream of miracles, and fetch them in here, while the whole scope and every circumstance of the text stood in the way of this exposition, I cannot divine ; for nothing can be more

remote from the sense of the place. If he had followed the old approved interpreter of Scripture, I mean the Scripture itself, and had looked into the context, he would have given us a more genuine comment. But philosophy, which has now set up for an interpreter (I had almost said a perverter), did certainly lead him into this violent and ridiculous gloss. But to come to the matter itself :

Miracles can be no otherwise the ground of assent, than as the medium of an argument to prove the divine mission of the worker. This then must be the opinion of these gentlemen, that they who heard the apostles or prophets, could not be satisfied that what they heard was divinely revealed, until they were convinced of it by proofs drawn from miracles or signs wrought by the preachers. That this is not merely my own conjecture, is evident from the accounts which we have of their opinions and hypotheses ;* whereof this is reckoned a principal one, that the mind of man, being rational, cannot be moved but by a rational impression ; that is, by the force of effectual reasons. To the same purpose we shall find Mr Locke expressing himself by and by.

Upon this hypothesis it is evident, 1. That a heathen, coming into a Christian assembly, and hearing Paul preach, or even Jesus Christ himself ; if he had never seen him work a miracle, would not be obliged to believe his doctrine. 2. If the apostles preached to those among whom they wrought no

* Spanhemii Elenchus Controversiarum, p. 320. ed. 1694.

miracles, they could not require them to believe, the evidence being withheld, whereon belief is founded.

3. They who heard the apostles and saw their miracles, could not be obliged to assent to their doctrine, until they had time to satisfy themselves, by reasoning, how far the miracles might be accounted for by natural causes ; and, admitting them to be supernatural, how far they would go toward proving the doctrine to be of God. 4. If any of the hearers were so dull as to be incapable of deciding such nice questions, I do not see how, upon these principles, they could be obliged to believe.

These, and the like, are no strained consequences ; for it is undeniable, that as our obligation to believe arises from the proposal of due objective evidence, so, where this is wanting, no man can be obliged to believe.

3. To come now to our own case. We who neither conversed with those to whom the revelations were originally given, nor saw the miracles which they wrought, are told by those rationalists that we have historical proofs, that there were such persons as the sacred writers, that they wrote the revelations which we now have, and that they wrought such miracles in confirmation of their divine mission and doctrine. Upon the evidence of these proofs we must rest. They will allow us no other ground for our faith. Hence Monsieur le Clerc tells us, that whatever faith is this day in the world among Christians, depends upon the testimony of men.

Among those who have embraced this opinion, Mr

Locke, upon several accounts, deserves to be particularly noticed ; wherefore I shall briefly and faithfully represent his opinion with the grounds of it, and make such animadversions upon them as may be necessary for clearing our way. His opinion you may take in the following propositions:—

1. Speaking of the different grounds and degrees of assent, he says,* “ Besides those we have hitherto mentioned, there is one sort of propositions that challenge the highest degree of our assent, upon bare testimony, whether the thing proposed agree or disagree with common experience, and the ordinary course of things, or no. The reason whereof is, because the testimony is of such an one as cannot deceive or be deceived ; and that is, of God himself. This carries with it assurance beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception. This is called by a peculiar name, Revelation, and our assent to it, Faith: which as absolutely determines our minds, and as perfectly excludes all wavering, as our knowledge itself.”

2. Notwithstanding this, he tells us in the same paragraph, that “ We must be sure that it is a divine revelation, and that we understand it aright;” and that “ our assent can be rationally no higher than an assurance, or a diffidence, arising from the more or less apparent probability of the proofs.” In other words, if the reasons proving it to be a revelation are only probable, our assurance amounts to no more than probability.

* Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xvi. sect. xiv.

3. He distinguishes between original and traditional revelation.* "By the one," he says, "I mean that first impression which is made immediately by God on the mind of any man, to which we cannot set any bounds; and by the other, those impressions delivered over to others in words, and the ordinary ways of conveying our conceptions one to another." Speaking of immediate or original revelation, he asserts that "no evidence of our faculties by which we receive such revelations, can exceed, if equal, the certainty of our intuitive knowledge."† And again he affirms, that whatsoever truths we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us, than those which are conveyed by *traditional* revelation."‡

4. In the next chapter, he writes as follows:—"Light, true light, in the mind, is, or can be, nothing else but the evidence of the truth of any proposition; and if it be not a self-evident proposition, all the light it has, or can have, is from the clearness and validity of those proofs upon which it is received. To talk of any other light in the understanding, is to put ourselves in the dark, or in the power of the prince of darkness."§

5. In the following paragraph, he tells us plainly, that there is no way of knowing any revelation to be

* Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xviii. sect. iii.

† Ibidem, book iv. chap. xviii. sect. v.

‡ Ibidem, book iv. chap. xviii. sect. iv.

§ Ibidem, book iv. chap. xix. sect. xiii.

from God, but by rational proofs ; or by "some marks in which reason cannot be mistaken."*

6. In the next paragraph he maintains (as we have noticed already), that the "internal light of assurance" which the prophets had, was not, without other signs, sufficient to testify, that the truths impressed on their minds, were from God.†

Thus far of Mr Locke's opinion ; which, in sum, amounts to this ; that the revelations, even as originally made, had not in them intrinsic evidence sufficient to assure those to whom they were given, that they were from God : that others who received such revelations from them at second hand, had no ground of assent, except the signs whereby they did confirm their mission : and that we, who saw not those signs, have no other ground of assent to the written revelations which have come down to us, than the historical evidence, that they who wrote them, wrought such signs in confirmation of their mission from God.

It is worth our while to dwell a little here, and consider Mr Locke's opinion, and the grounds of it. I shall therefore offer a few observations on this doctrine.

1. In his first proposition, Mr Locke speaks very honourably of divine faith. As to the assent, or act of faith, he says, that it is an assent of the highest degree ; assurance without doubt. As to the ground of it, that it is such as challenges an assent of the highest degree ; that it is evidence beyond exception. These

* Human Understanding, book iv. chap. xix. sect. xiv.

† Ibidem, book iv. chap. xix. sect. xv.

are goodly words ; but let us look a little into his meaning.

To find it out, I shall suppose that God doth (as no doubt he did) reveal immediately to Paul this proposition, "Jesus is the Son of God." Here is a revelation. Paul assents to it : well, here is faith. Now, in believing this proposition, he may be said to assent to three things : that what God says is true ; that Jesus is the Son of God ; and that God says this to Paul.

Now I ask Mr Locke, or any of our rationalists, which of these three is it, of which Paul has evidence beyond exception, and to which his assent is of the highest degree ?

1. Could Mr Locke's meaning be, that in this act of faith, Paul assented with the highest assurance to this general verity, "that God's testimony is infallibly true" ? No surely : for the assent to this truth is not an act of faith, but of intuitive knowledge.

2. Could his meaning be, that Paul had evidence beyond exception, and assurance beyond doubt, of this proposition, "Jesus is the Son of God" ? Surely Mr Locke knew, that on the foregoing supposition, Paul assented to this truth, only *as revealed*. Then the degree of his assent would depend on the evidence which he had, that it was God who revealed it : and if this were not such as to challenge an assent of the highest degree, he could not receive the proposition with the highest degree of assurance. For, as Mr Locke says truly, our assurance of any revealed truth

cannot rise higher than our assurance that it is revealed. Wherefore,

3. Can his meaning be, that Paul would have evidence beyond exception, challenging the highest degree of assent, to this proposition, "God did reveal to him that Jesus is the Son of God?" It is the assent to this, that properly constitutes faith. Mr Locke must have meant this, or he meant nothing. Yet I scarcely suppose that he did mean this: for he afterwards affirms, that "no evidence of our faculties by which we receive such revelations, can exceed, if equal, the certainty of our intuitive knowledge." If then we have not evidence of God's being the revealer, equal at least to what we have for our intuitive knowledge, we cannot have the highest degree of assurance. Again he tells us, that there is no way of knowing any revelation to be from God, but by rational proofs; or by "some marks in which reason cannot be mistaken." Yet he acknowledges that the evidence of all our reasonings is still short of that which we have for our intuitive knowledge. This appears to me to overthrow his first proposition altogether.

Whatever Mr Locke has, in that proposition, conceded to faith, he has taken care that we who live now, shall not be the better for it: for afterwards he tells us plainly, that "whatsoever truths we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us, than those which are conveyed by traditional revelation." We have no revelation at this day but

that which Mr Locke calls traditional : and here it is plain, that he considered our certainty of any truth, derived from that source, as inferior in degree to any kind of natural knowledge, whether intuitive, rational, or sensible.

The foundation of all is manifestly what he teaches in the fourth proposition above quoted ; that to talk of any other light in the understanding, besides that of self-evidence, reason, and sense, is to put ourselves in the dark. I have added this last, the light of sense, because, though he doth not mention it here, he admits it elsewhere.

That we may rightly understand Mr Locke's assertion, it must be observed, that writers treating of this subject usually speak of two kinds of light, subjective and objective. By the former is meant, either our ability to perceive, discern, and judge of objects ; or our actual knowledge and assent : by the latter, the evidence on which our knowledge is founded, and by which our assent or dissent is determined. It is of this latter that Mr Locke is treating, in his chapter on Enthusiasm, from which this proposition is taken.

His doctrine is shortly this : There is a threefold objective light which is a just ground of assent. 1. Self-evidence, resulting from the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of our ideas, when compared together : this is the ground of intuitive knowledge. 2. Rational evidence, in which our judgment is assisted in the comparison, by assuming intermediate ideas ; and 3. Sensible evidence, result-

ing from impressions made on our minds through the organs of sense. Besides these three, he admits no other objective light or evidence as a just ground of assent ; and adds, that to talk of any other, is to turn enthusiasts ; to put ourselves in the dark ; yea, in the power of the prince of darkness.

In examining this doctrine, we shall not at present inquire whether it does not really preclude all place for faith, properly so called. This will appear in the issue. In the mean time, if the doctrine be true, it is certain that faith, if it be not founded on one of those three grounds of assent, is altogether irrational.

Farther ; taking self-evidence for that which is immediately perceptible by the natural power of our intellectual faculties, not assisted, elevated, or renewed, by any supernatural influence ; and taking sensible evidence for the impressions received from corporeal substances through the bodily organs, it cannot be supposed that Mr Locke intended to make either of these the ground of faith in the divine testimony. The only foundation therefore that remains, is rational evidence. But I need not spend time in proving this, since it is no more than he has taught us in the fifth proposition quoted above.

This is the sum and substance of what is pleaded, or, for aught I know, can be pleaded, for the judgment of our rationalists. We shall therefore weigh the matter more seriously, proceeding by plain steps, in the following propositions.

Prop. 1. If a fourth kind of objective evidence can

be proved by good and solid reasons, it must be admitted ; although we are not able to give a satisfactory account of its nature.

This, as a general truth, has, I believe, never been denied by any person of judgment, adverting to, and understanding, what he said. If any one denies it in words, every one admits it in fact. Who is he that, upon good proof drawn from their causes, effects, and inseparable adjuncts, admits not the existence of many things, of whose nature he can give no satisfactory account ? We all acknowledge the mutual influence of our souls and bodies, upon proofs taken from their effects on each other : but who understands the manner in which the soul operates on the body, or the body on it ? Instances of this kind are innumerable.

Sufficient proofs must always determine our assent. If we have sufficient reasons to prove the existence of a fourth kind of objective light, and deny it because we cannot give a clear account of its nature, I know not but we may, for the very same reason, reject the three kinds admitted by Mr Locke. He has probably done as much as any man to explain them : but were he yet alive, I believe he would readily acknowledge, that he has been far from satisfying himself, or offering what may fully satisfy others, as to what evidence is, or wherein it consists ; what is that evidence that is the ground of intuitive knowledge, or of rational knowledge, or of sensible knowledge ; and how these different kinds of evidence operate, and

influence the assent. His accounts of these things are merely descriptions, taken from causes, effects, or the like. But what objective light or evidence really is, remains as great a mystery as ever. For instance, when he tells us that self-evidence is that which is perceived at once, without the intervention of intermediate ideas, I learn, that self-evidence differs from rational evidence, which requires intermediate ideas. But this is all : except that it is perceptible by the mind ; that is, that it is evidence. But what evidence is, I have yet to learn.

Prop. 2. A fourth kind of objective evidence, different from the three assigned by Mr Locke, is not impossible.

If any one affirm that it is, it lies upon him to prove it. That millions have never observed such a light in themselves, will not prove that it is impossible ; or even that it does not exist ; yea, that such a light has never been in their own minds : for although Mr Locke observed the actings of his mind as accurately as most men, it is possible that some of them may have escaped his notice.

It cannot be pretended that it is impossible for want of a sufficient cause, while God liveth, who is the Father of lights, and author of the three kinds of light that are admitted. Is it not possible for Him who made our organs of sense, to frame others, different from those which we have ; and by means of them, to impart to us other perceptions whereby our judgment may be determined ? Or could he not make such

impressions without the intervention of bodily organs? To deny this, would appear very strange and irrational to sober men who have due thoughts of God.

We who enjoy the benefit of sight, have a kind of objective evidence different from any that men have who were born blind. Why then should it be thought impossible that others should possess a kind of evidence whereof we have no experience? And that, equally convincing with any that we have, or even more so?

Mr Locke himself grants, that on some occasions, God, by his Spirit, illuminates the minds of men with the knowledge of truths, in extraordinary ways, to which no bounds can be set. If this be so, why may not evidence of a different kind, result from such extraordinary illuminations and impressions?

Either God can so reveal his mind to man as to give the highest evidence that it is He who speaks, or he cannot. If he can, then an objective evidence is possible, and that of the highest kind, different from the three kinds allowed by Mr Locke. That it must be different, is manifest: for in the case of immediate revelation, he allows no place for self-evidence or intuitive knowledge, which he determines to be the highest of the three kinds of evidence; saying, "No evidence of our faculties by which we receive such revelations, can exceed, if equal, the certainty of our intuitive knowledge." Wherefore, since this evidence of the highest degree, is different from what we have in our intuitive knowledge, and confessedly superior to that which is the ground of rational or of sensible

knowledge, a fourth kind of evidence is admitted to be possible.

On the other hand, if God cannot reveal his mind to man with the highest degree of evidence, it follows unavoidably, that his testimony cannot produce the highest degree of assent ; which, as Mr Locke well observes, is undoubtedly its due. It is in vain to reply, that God's testimony is infallible : for, as Mr Locke truly says, our assent to any truth on that testimony, can be rationally no higher than our assurance that it is a divine revelation, and that we understand it aright. To me it looks like blasphemy, to imagine that God has made a rational creature, to whom he is unable to impart his mind with such assurance as will command the respect that is due to it.

Prop. 3. A fourth kind of objective evidence, different from the three specified by Mr Locke, doth really exist.

The prophets to whom immediate revelations were made, had objective evidence, sufficient to ground the highest assurance that God himself was the revealer. It is impious to deny this. Now Mr Locke will not allow that this evidence was such as founds intuitive knowledge : and all must acknowledge that it came not through the outward senses. That it was not grounded on reasoning from marks or signs extrinsecal, or even from anything intrinsecal, to the revelations themselves, appears to be undeniable. For the Scripture, so far from countenancing such notions, seems plainly to teach the contrary. The evidence conveyed

by the impressions themselves, was so convincing as to bear down the force of the strongest arguments that stood against it. This appears eminently in the case of Abraham, when he was commanded to offer up his son Isaac. If the command had not been impressed on his mind with an evidence beyond what any reasoning from signs could pretend to, the plain arguments that lay against it, combined with the strongest natural affection, must have carried it. If he was convinced by such reasonings, is it not strange that he made no mention of them, when it was so liable to be questioned whether God could give such a command? It must be obvious to any one who attentively considers this case, that nothing less could have prevailed, but the irresistible evidence of the impression itself whereby the command was given. But to wave any farther consideration of this, of which we have now no experience,

Mr Locke will admit, that the primitive Christians who embraced the gospel, did so upon sufficient objective evidence. He is not a Christian who denies it. But Mr Locke will not, in this case, admit intuitive evidence: and I hope to make it appear afterwards, that it was not on such evidence as he talks of, that they received the gospel.

The Scriptures demand our assent, and offer no evidence but the authority of God. Arguments are not insisted on, to prove that it is God who speaketh. God doth not require us to assent without objective evidence; and yet he waves the use of such arguments

as Mr Locke would have to be the foundation of our faith. Some objective light of a different kind, must therefore be assumed as the ground of the required assent. That it is so, the Scripture teacheth ; as we shall see when this proposition comes to be proved and more fully explained.

Independent of this, we have ground, as good as can be desired, and as good as the nature of the thing admits, for believing that there is a light, distinct from those which are specified by Mr Locke. To the persons who have it, this light evidences itself in the same way that other kinds of intellectual light do. They are conscious of it ; and experience the same effects from it, in determining the mind to assent, and giving rest in the full conviction of truth. To those who have it not, it affords such evidence as men who were born blind have of the existence of visible evidence. They have the concurring testimony of persons, sober, rational, and judicious, who have given evidence of the greatest caution in guarding against delusion, enthusiasm, and groundless imaginations. Moreover, the existence of this light is farther evidenced by the peculiar effects which flow from a faith grounded upon it. But I cannot stay to prove this further at present.

Prop. 4. Although it is perhaps impossible to give an account of this light, every way satisfactory, to those who are unacquainted with it ; or to convey to them a notion of its nature and properties, as accurate as they have who know it by experience ; yet such an

account may be given of it, as ought to secure it against the imputation of being irrational or unintelligible.

That light, or objective evidence, which founds the obligation to believe the Scriptures, and on which, all that are subjectively enlightened do ground their assent, is of such a nature, that a more intelligible account of it by far, may be given to those who have no experience of it, than can be given of the evidence of visible objects, to persons who have no experience of sight. To clear this, let the following things be attended to :

The writings of men, especially of those who have any peculiarity of genius, and excel in any kind of composition, are distinguished by certain marks and characters, not only in the matter, but in the manner of expression. Such a spirit may be observed, and somewhat so peculiar to the author, that those who are acquainted with his writings, cannot avoid the conviction that this or that book, although it bear not his name, was written by him.* Few men who are accustomed to read books with attention and judgment, have not experienced this. It is often employed as a test to discover whether a book is the genuine production of the author whose name it bears, and in many cases it is found more convincing than the

* "Though you had not named the author, &c., I could have both known and avouched him. There is a face of a style, by which we scholars know one another, no less than our persons by a visible countenance."—*Bishop Hall*.

testimony of credible witnesses. Yet it must be acknowledged, that persons of the best judgment, and most capable of expressing their thoughts intelligibly, while they cannot question the existence of this kind of evidence, would find it difficult, if not impossible, to shew wherein it consists.

Men differ infinitely less from one another, than the most exalted of created beings does from God himself. If men leave upon their writings such discernible characters of their own genius and spirit, is it not reasonable to believe, that a book written by the Most High, must bear a peculiar and distinguishing impress of its divine author, which will be discerned with the greater certainty, by those who have right notions of God, as the difference between him and the most exalted human genius, is infinitely greater, than between the most elevated scholar, and the most contemptible pamphleteer. Nay, is it not impossible, rationally to imagine the contrary? That he who, on all his works, down to the meanest insect, has left such impressions of himself, as prove him to be their author, hath not left impressions more remarkable and distinguishing on his Word? That Word which he has "magnified above all his name;" that is, above all other means of making himself known? That Word which he designed to be the principal means of imparting to men the knowledge of himself, to his own glory and their salvation?

This impress, those characters, prints, and vestiges of the divine perfections, must be apparent, not only,

or principally, in the matter itself, but also in the words and writings by which it is expressed ; in their style, in their spirit, scope, and tendency. This ΘΕΟ-ΠΡΕΠΕΙΑ, this God-becoming impress of majesty, sovereignty, omniscience, independence, holiness, justice, goodness, wisdom, and power, is an objective light and evidence, not only sufficient, but the greatest that can be imagined. On intuition of this evidence, any one who has "an understanding given him to know Him that is true," and is thereby made to entertain suitable notions of the Deity, will, without waiting to reason on the matter, have his assent carried, and unavoidably determined, to rest upon it as the highest ground of assurance.

This assent, founded on the impress of the Deity upon his own Word, is indeed an assent of the highest degree ; and thus far, our faith resembles our intuitive knowledge. There is, however, this difference between them, not as to the manner *in* which the mind acteth, but as to the ability *by* which it acteth, that in our intuitive knowledge, as defined by Mr Locke, the evidence, or objective light, is such as is not only discerned immediately without reasoning, but is discernible by our understandings without any subjective light or supernatural work of the Spirit of God upon them : whereas the assent of faith described above, requireth such a work, to repair our disabled faculties, to elevate and guide them, to fix our attention, and to free us from that aversion of the will, that disorder of the affections, and those prejudices, that obstruct

the discerning power. And moreover, according to the greater or lesser degree of this divine assistance, our assent will be stronger or weaker, more fixed or wavering, although the objective evidence is always the same.

When this objective evidence is actually under the view of the mind, thus disposed and assisted, it makes a corresponding impression on the whole soul. The beaming of God's sovereign authority awes the conscience. The piercing evidence of his omniscience, increases that awe. The view of goodness, mercy, grace, and love, operates on the will, and leaves a relish on the affections. This impression, although of a spiritual nature, and conversant about spiritual things, doth truly resemble sensible evidence: and, as evidence, is not inferior, but on many accounts preferable to it. This self-evidencing power, keeps pace, in degree, with the self-evidencing light from which it arises, in proportion to the clearness of the view that is obtained of that light.

The effects wrought upon the soul are not transient. Some of them remain ever after, and many of them for a long tract of time. In their nature, they tend to the perfecting of our faculties, even in the judgment of sober unprejudiced reason: and their reality appears, to the conviction of beholders, in their influence upon the deportment of those who are the subjects of them. Hence it is, that although our faith neither needeth reasoning, nor buildeth upon it, yet those effects afford solid ground for a rational

and argumentative confirmation of our assent ; both for the conviction of others, and for our own establishment in the truth, when the evidence by which our faith was first produced, and on which it rests, is not actually under our view.

This evidence doth indeed challenge assent of the highest degree. Upon this ground, the saints of God, even those of the meanest condition, and under the greatest disadvantages in respect of capacity and education, have, in life and in death, given proofs of a faith amounting to assurance without doubt, even the full assurance of faith ; yea, the riches of the full assurance of understanding. Of this we have notable instances not a few, in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Prop. 5. This light, or objective evidence, whereon faith is grounded, has no affinity with enthusiastic impulses or imaginations.

It leans upon the strongest reason and the most pregnant evidence : whereas, enthusiastic impressions are irrational. It carries no contradiction to our faculties, but influences them in a way suitable to their nature and condition. In their due exercise, they do not contradict or disprove it ; but, as we have said, do rather, on perceiving its effects, confirm it. It is not a persuasion, or a ground for it, independent of the Word, or contrary to it ; but it is the evidence of the Word itself, directing us to attend to the Word, and to improve it.

Mr Locke is welcome to run down, as much as he

pleaseth, all enthusiasm, and all persuasions whereof no reason can be given : nevertheless, what he has delivered on that subject, must be received with some caution. A persuasion whereof no reason can be given, is certainly not faith, but fancy : yet a persuasion may be solid, whereof he that hath it, is, through weakness, unable to give an account. Again, a persuasion may be solid, of which he that hath it, cannot give to another person, evidence of the same kind with that which he hath himself : it is enough that sufficient proof be offered, of a different kind. A man may see and feel, and may be satisfied that he doth. His inability to account for the nature of things that are within him, concludeth not against the reality and truth of what he knows by experience ; but his experience is not a ground of conviction to others. An uneducated man, of shallow capacity, may be convicted of enthusiasm, by a subtle blind man, to whom he cannot explain the nature of visible evidence, or give any other proof that he is not mistaken, but that he sees : and yet he assenteth not without reason, and hath no ground to question what he seeth ; but may, and will, securely laugh at the sophistry of the blind man, and tell him he is blind. The cases are parallel. We must not be frightened out of our faith and experience, by this atheistical scarecrow.

Prop. 6. That many read the Scriptures without discerning this light, is no argument against it.

Many want that supernatural ability, that under-

standing, whereby God is known, whereby Christ's sheep know his voice from that of a stranger : and so, not being of God, they cannot hear his words, John x. 4, 5, viii. 47. Many are destitute of any tolerable notions of God. It is impossible that such should discern what is suitable to him. Many, both of the learned and the unlearned, have perverse notions of God riveted on their minds : and finding the Scripture opposed to these preconceived notions, they look upon it as foolishness. Many want that humble frame of spirit, to which the promise of divine teaching is made ; Psalm xxv. 9. It is to them who are fools in their own eyes, that wisdom is given. Many are proud and conceited : no wonder that they know nothing. In many, the vanity of the mind is not cured ; so they hunt after vain things, and fix not their thoughts on what is solid : whereby their minds are darkened, and their foolish hearts are hardened. Not a few are under the power of prevailing lusts, and disordered affections. Out of favour to these, they are so far from desiring to increase in knowledge, that on the contrary, they like not to retain God in their knowledge at all. What they already know, is uneasy to them, and therefore they would be rid of it. Many despise the Spirit of God, reject his operations, and seek not after him. No wonder that they who refuse the guide, lose their way. For these and other sins, many are judicially left to the god of this world, who blindeth the minds of them that believe not ; 2 Cor. iv. 4. Many never attain to the know-

ledge of the doctrine, whether it be of God, because they never seriously attempt to do his will, John vii. 17.

If all these things be considered, so far from questioning the truth, because many see not its evidence, we shall discern, in this very blindness, an argument to prove it, and a strong evidence of the need of supernatural power to believe it.

Finally, persons who are sober and attentive, are not without some darker views of this evidence; which may and ought to draw them on to wait for more light: and I look upon the honourable concessions in favour of the Scriptures, which have been made by adversaries, as having proceeded from some fainter views of this nature.

Thus have I stated the question in dispute between us and the rationalists, and considered the force of Mr Locke's reasoning. I have assigned an intelligible notion of the reason of faith, adapted to all, even to the meanest, who are under obligation to believe the Scriptures: whereas, the historical proofs are above the reach of thousands, and are never heard of by multitudes, who are obliged, on pain of damnation, to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God.

Having, under the third proposition, overthrown the ground of Mr Locke's opinion, we are now to shew that what he builds upon it, must fall of course; particularly what he says, book iv. chap. xviii. par. 6, "I do not see how those who make revelation alone the sole object of faith, can say, that it is a matter of

faith, and not of reason, to believe that such or such a proposition, to be found in such or such a book, is of divine inspiration ; unless it be revealed, that that proposition, or all in that book, was communicated by divine inspiration. Without such a revelation, the believing or not believing that proposition or book to be of divine authority, can never be matter of faith, but matter of reason ; and such as I must come to an assent to, only by the use of my reason."

What Mr Locke intended by this discourse, I know not ; unless it were to compel us to prove the inspiration of every particular proposition contained in the Scripture, before we are warranted to believe what it exhibits : which would overthrow the Christian religion, or at least deprive mankind in general of any advantage by it. But waving other remarks, I shall only animadvert a little upon this assertion, "That our believing any proposition to be from God, is not an act of faith, but of reason."

If his meaning were, that our assent to the propositions of Scripture, is an act of our rational or intellective faculty, it might well be admitted. Or if it were, that our assent is consistent with the principles of sound reason, and proceeds on such grounds as are required by the nature of our understandings ; in this sense, we should admit that it is an act of reason. But neither of these being intended, we cannot agree with Mr Locke when he asserts, that our belief of Scripture propositions is not built upon divine testimony, but upon arguments independent of it,

whereby their inspiration is proved or supported. On the contrary we maintain, that the Scriptures do evidence themselves to be from God ; and that the truths therein revealed, are by no means to be ranked among conjectural things, supported on mere probabilities, such as historical proofs, and reasonings founded upon them.

The question, in short, amounts to this : whereas the Scriptures, wherever they come, oblige all that have the offer of them, to receive them as the Word of God ; upon what ground or formal reason do we thus receive them, to the glory of God, and our own salvation ?

In answer to this important inquiry, I shall offer what hath satisfied myself, upon mature consideration of the Scriptures, in connection with my own experience, and a review of what hath been written on the subject by others ; especially by that profound and judicious divine Dr Owen. This I shall do in a few propositions ; which I shall lay down, explain, and confirm, with as much brevity and perspicuity as possible.

PROPOSITION I.

“The ground on which we are required to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God, is not the authority of any man or church.”

This is fully demonstrated by our writers against the Papists. It is sufficient for our purpose to ob-

serve, 1. That this is not to believe God and his prophets for their own testimony. When God speaketh to us, our duty is, to believe him on account of his own veracity. 2. Men may be deceived, and may deceive us: "All men are liars." 3. This is nowhere in Scripture proposed as the ground of our duty. 4. The church and her doctrines are to be tried by the Word; and her testimony is to be received in so far only as the Word consenteth: wherefore, to make this the ground of our faith, is to reason in a circle, of which the church of Rome can never clear herself. But I need not insist farther on this head. The only church that claims this right, has been convicted of so many falsehoods, that her testimony serves rather to prejudice a cause, than to confirm it.

PROPOSITION II.

"The rational arguments whereby the truth of the Christian religion is demonstrated against atheists, although useful in many ways, are not the ground whereon they who have the Scriptures proposed to them, are obliged to receive them as the Word of God."

These moral and rational considerations are of use, to strengthen the faith of believers, and to relieve them against the objections of enemies; to stop the mouths of adversaries; to beget, in those who are yet ignorant of the intrinsic value of the Word, some respect for it, and to attract their serious attention to

it. This is granted : and in this atheistical age, is sufficient to induce all sorts of persons who value the Scriptures, to study them. Yet it is not upon those rational arguments, that our faith in the divine authority of the Scripture is to be founded. For, 1. Although they are a proper foundation for a rational assent, and are sufficient to beget a strong moral persuasion of the truth, this persuasion cannot properly be called faith, which is an assent upon testimony. 2. The faith required of us, is not founded on the wisdom of men, 1 Cor. ii. 5 ; that is, on the reasonings or arguments of men. Now this moral persuasion rests entirely on these. 3. Many are obliged to receive the Scriptures, to whom these arguments were never offered ; and many who are incapable of understanding their force. The apostles never used them ; and yet required their hearers to receive the word of God.

PROPOSITION III.

“The miracles by which the sacred writers proved their commission, are not the foundation of our faith in the divine authority of the Scriptures.”

I need not spend much time in clearing this. For, 1. Many who saw not the miracles, are under obligation to believe. 2. For most of the miracles, we have no other evidence but the testimony of the Word itself. 3. The Scripture nowhere teaches men to expect miracles as the ground of their faith ; but,

on the contrary, refers them to the words of Moses and the prophets, Luke xvi. 31.

PROPOSITION IV.

“The ground on which we are required to believe the Scripture, is not a secret intimation by the Spirit of God, distinct from the written Word, assuring us that it is the Word of God.”

This needs no long proof. For, 1. No man is under obligation to receive the Scripture, to whom the ground of the obligation is not proposed. But many are obliged to believe, to whom no such secret suggestion was ever granted. 2. Neither the Word of God, nor the experience of his people, gives any reason to look for such suggestions. Besides, the question would recur, What reason is there to believe that suggestion to be from God?

PROPOSITION V.

“The ground of our obligation to believe the Word of God, is not the authority of any particular proposition of Scripture, bearing testimony to all the rest. For example, 2 Timothy iii. 16, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

This is very plain on many accounts. For instance, 1. These passages have no more evidence of inspiration, than other places of Scripture. 2. Although they had been left out, we should have been obliged

to believe. Yea, those who had them not, were under obligation to believe what they had.

PROPOSITION VI.

“The ground of our obligation to believe the Word of God, is not that its doctrines are suitable to our natural notions of God, and adapted to our necessities, desires, and capacities.”

I shall not spend time in controverting this idea, which some appear to be fond of: only I observe,
1. The suitableness of revealed truths to our natural notions, as discerned by unrenewed men, is not a ground for faith, but for a persuasion of a different kind. 2. Many revealed truths do not answer this description: for example, the doctrine of the Trinity, which no man can reasonably receive on this account. Although these truths are not contrary to our reason, there is an appearance of inconsistency between them, which has startled many.

PROPOSITION VII.

“The ground of our obligation to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God, is not, that God hath, by his Spirit, wrought faith in us, and thereby enabled us to receive them.”

I have added this proposition, because Protestants have, although falsely, been accused of holding such an irrational opinion. It is indeed true, that we

cannot savingly believe the Scriptures until it please God to remove, by his Holy Spirit, our natural darkness and prejudices, whereby we are prevented from receiving his Word ; and to work in us that gracious ability to receive it, which is saving faith. Yet this is not the reason of our assent to the Scriptures. If we should be asked, on what account we believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, it would be impertinent to answer, we believe it because God hath wrought in us the faith of it. This would shew, not wherefore we believe, but how we obtained the power or ability to believe.

PROPOSITION VIII.

“Wherefore, to the question, On what ground do you receive the Scriptures as the Word of God ? we do not answer, On the testimony of the church ; or because of the weighty moral arguments by which their divine authority is supported ; or because the Sacred Writers wrought miracles ; or because of any secret suggestion from God himself ; or because particular Scriptures bear witness to the inspiration of the whole ; or because the truths which they reveal approve themselves to our reason, as worthy of God ; or finally, because God has given us an ability to believe.”

This is the sum of what has been advanced on the negative side. The arguments conclude against all the rejected reasons, whether taken singly or con-

jointly. We now proceed to the positive side of the question.

PROPOSITION IX.

“The faith whereby we assent unto, and receive, the Word of God, to his glory and our own salvation, is faith divine and supernatural.”

It is necessary to insist a little in confirming this important truth ; because there are some who would persuade us, that whatever faith is, at this day, to be found among men, is built upon, and resolved into, the testimony of men.*

The understanding, that power or faculty whereby we perceive truth, and assent to it on its proper evidence, may be distinguished into different subordinate powers, according to the different kinds of truth to which it assents. To the self-evident maxims of reason, (such as this proposition, “The same thing, at the same time, cannot be and not be,”) we assent at once, on their being proposed to us in terms which we understand. To some truths, our assent is gained by arguments drawn from known truths, which are themselves either self-evident or acknowledged by us: and to other truths we assent on the testimony of credible witnesses. This last kind of assent, and the faculty by which it is given, are both known by the name of faith.

Faith, then, is that power or ability of the mind of

* Le Clerc, in his *Logics*.

man, whereby he is capable of assenting, and doth assent, on the evidence of testimony. Now, as testimony may be given, either by the Most High himself, or by men, or by angels, good or bad ; faith may be considered as either divine, or human, or angelical. The last of these, not being to our purpose, may be set aside. The faith which assents on the testimony of man, is called human faith ; that which assents on the testimony of God, who cannot lie, is divine faith.

Divine faith, then, is that power, or ability, whereby, in compliance with our duty, we assent unto and receive, to the glory of God, and our own salvation, the truths which are proposed to us on the evidence of God's Word or testimony. In this definition we include the words, "in compliance with our duty, to the glory of God, and our own salvation," because men, and even devils, may, on the evidence of God's testimony, assent to some truths, in a way that neither answers their duty, nor turns to the glory of God in their salvation. This assent we pass over, as not belonging to the faith of which we are discoursing.

The faith now described, is called divine and supernatural on two accounts : 1, Because it is wrought in the soul by the power of God ; and 2, because it rests on his testimony alone.

1. This faith is wrought in the soul by the power of God. To clear this, we shall merely hint at the heads of a few arguments ; referring, for farther proof, to the controversial treatises. 1. This ability to believe and receive the truths of God, to his glory and

our own salvation, is expressly denied to natural or unrenewed men ; 1 Cor. ii. 14, " The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." John viii. 47 : " Ye therefore hear not God's words, because ye are not of God." 2 Thess. iii. 2, " All men have not faith." 2. It is expressly denied to be of ourselves, and asserted to be a supernatural gift of God ; Eph. ii. 8, " By grace are ye saved, through faith ; and that, not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God." 3. The production of it is ascribed unto God. It is he that " fulfilleth in his people, the work of faith with power," 2 Thess. i. 11. It is he that " giveth them," that is, that enableth them, " on the behalf of Christ, to believe on him, and to suffer for his sake ;" Philip. i. 29. Faith is one of the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. v. 22 : and in Heb. xii. 2, Christ is styled " the author and finisher of our faith."

2. This faith resteth not on the evidence of men, but on the testimony of God, evidencing itself. In 1 Cor. ii. 5, it is described as that which standeth " not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God : " that is, (as appeareth by comparing the 4th and 13th verses,) not in the reasoning or eloquence of men, but in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, and, by his power accompanying them, doth demonstrate to be the Word of God. In 1 Thess. ii. 13, it is held forth as a receiving of the Word, " not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually

worketh in them that believe." Many other proofs might be added ; but these are sufficient for our purpose.

We shall next very briefly prove, that it is our duty thus to receive the Scriptures. 1. They are the Word of God, and every where profess to be so. They are the Oracles of God, which holy men of God, spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost : " and by them the Holy Ghost speaketh unto us.* Now, the very light of nature teacheth, that when God speaketh and commandeth, we are bound to assent and obey. 2. The Scriptures were written for this very end, that we may believe, and that, believing, we may have life : John xx. 30, 31. The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, is now, by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith : Rom. xvi. 25, 26. Again, the apostle Peter, (2d Epistle i. 17-19) after speaking of the voice which came from heaven on the holy mount, adds, " We have also a more sure Word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed," (that is, it is your duty to take heed,) as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." 3. The most dreadful judgments are threatened on those who receive not the Word of God from the prophets or apostles : (whether by speech or writing is all one)

* Heb. v. 12 ; 2 Peter i. 20, 21 ; 2 Tim. iii. 16 ; Mark xii. 36 ; Acts i. 16 ; Acts xxviii. 25-27 ; Heb. iii. 7, 8.

Matt. x. 14, 15 : "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrhæ in the day of judgment, than for that city." Accordingly, the apostles preach the word at Antioch in Pisidia ; demand acceptance of it both from Jews and Gentiles, and, upon their refusal, testify against them in the way of the Lord's appointment, (Acts xiii. 51 :) although, so far as appeareth, they wrought no miracle there, to confirm their mission. 4. The Thessalonians (1st Epistle, ii. 13), are commended for receiving the Word, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God : a sufficient proof that it was their duty.

Here it may be objected, that if believing is not in our own power, it cannot be our duty. I answer briefly : 1. The light of nature requireth of us perfect obedience ; yet we are unable to render it. 2. The Scripture requireth us to "serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear ;" but telleth us at the same time, that we need "grace" to do so : Heb. xii. 28. 3. "We have destroyed ourselves ;" Hosea xiii. 9. "We have fallen by our iniquity ;" Hosea xiv. 1. In consequence of our fall, our natural ability to believe truth upon testimony, is so much impaired in itself, and obstructed by prejudices, that we are unable to discern the clear evidence of God's authority which he has impressed upon his Word, and to assent in a due manner to his testimony. But this inability

which we have brought upon ourselves, cannot affect the unquestionable right which God hath, to require of all his rational creatures that they should give credit to his Word. Wherefore, 4. Our duty is, to take blame to ourselves, to justify God, to aim at obedience to his will, and to wait upon him in all the ways of his own appointment. If we are sincere in this, we have no reason to despair: but are permitted to hope, that although we cannot claim it as our due, it may please God, of his sovereign grace, to give us an understanding, that we may know whether the Scriptures are his own Word, or the words of men. John vii. 17; 1 John v. 20.

PROPOSITION X.

The formal reason of our obligation to believe the Scriptures, and to receive them as the Word of God, and the ground on which we so receive them, is the authority of the God of truth speaking in them, evidencing itself, by its own light and power, to our faith when duly exercised about them.

In explanation of this proposition, which contains the truth principally intended, I shall offer the few following remarks.

1. The evidence of God in his Word, how great soever it is, cannot determine the assent of any one whose faith, or power of assenting, is not duly disposed; nor is it necessary that it should. The blind cannot see the sun, though he shine ever so clearly.

No wonder that the evidence of God's authority and truth in his Word, should not be perceived by those who have lost the power, which they had by nature, of discerning spiritual truths ; and to whom God hath not yet restored it by supernatural grace.

2. Even one who may possess this faith, or power of assent, unless it be exercised, and duly applied to the consideration of the Word on which the evidence is impressed, will fail in giving that assent to divine truth which is required of him, in the way of duty, to the glory of God, and his own salvation : just as the evidence of moral, metaphysical, or mathematical truths, is not discerned by many capable persons, because they do not duly apply their minds to the observation of it. Although the evidence which God has imparted to his Word, doth not, like the light of the sun, force an acknowledgment from all ; yet it is abundantly sufficient to satisfy those who have eyes to see, and who apply their minds to it in the way of duty.

3. This light, which evidenceth the divine authority of the Scriptures, is impressed on every truth, and on every word which God speaketh to us : but it is best seen when the words are viewed in their proper connection, and as they stand related to other parts of Scripture. Of this, more anon.

4. When it is asserted that the Scripture evidenceth itself to be the Word of God, by its own light and power, there is no place for the captious question, How do ye know that the light of which you speak,

is from God ? For it is of the nature of light, whether external and sensible, or internal and mental, (and it is hard to determine which of these two kinds is light properly, and which metaphorically,) not only to render objects visible, but, in proportion to its clearness, to satisfy the mind as to the medium by which they are seen. When we enjoy the light of the sun, we need no arguments to persuade us that it is light, and that it is real. The proof of a mathematical truth, not only convinces us, that the proposition in which it is enunciated, is true, but also that the evidence on which we believe it, is real. In like manner, the divine light which accompanies the Word, not only convinces us that the things which it reveals are true, but also, in proportion to its degree, that the light which discovers them to us is truth, and is no lie. Nor is any argument necessary to prove this, to any one who enjoys that light. If a blind man should ask me how I know that the sun shines, and that I see it ; I would answer, I know it by the evidence of its own light. If he should further inquire, how I prove that I am not under a delusion ; I should be obliged to produce such arguments as he might be capable of understanding. Now it will be granted, that the evidence of these arguments, though it may be more convincing to him, must fall exceedingly short of the evidence which I have from the light itself. Moreover, the arguments which I use with the blind man are not intended to convince myself, but to satisfy him, and to answer his objections. In like manner, if

one who rejects the Scriptures, should ask me how I know that they are the Word of God ; I would answer, I know it by the evidence of their own light and power. If he should add, I cannot discern that light ; I would answer, that is because your own mind is darkened ; either you have no eyes, or else they are shut. If he should further urge, that my light is not real ; I would prove it to be so, by such arguments as he could understand. These arguments, although they may stop his mouth, are not the foundation of my belief. They may, however, be of use to fortify me against his sophistry. For, though I could not be persuaded to disbelieve the evidence that shines upon my mind, I might find some difficulty in answering his arguments ; which, at times, through my own inadvertency, or the indisposition of my mind, or by reason of clouds interposing between me and the light, might even shake me a little.

5. Considering that our minds are naturally dark, sluggish, weak, and unstable ; that we are renewed but in part, and that our faith is liable to many defects, and exposed to many temptations ; the ministry of the church is of great importance, to awaken our attention, to cure the indisposition of our minds, to hold up the light before us, and to point out and explain the truths which it discovers ; whereby, through the efficacy of the divine ordination and appointment, its evidence becomes more and more apparent.*

* "We may be moved and induced, by the testimony of the

6. In order to our holding fast the faith, and persevering in it to the end ; besides the outward ministry of the church, the inward renovation of the mind by the Holy Ghost, and the moral arguments already spoken of, we stand in need of the daily influences of the Spirit of God, to strengthen faith, to remove prejudices and incidental indispositions, to seal the truths on our minds, to give us refreshing tastes of them, and, in many ways, to confirm us against opposition.

7. This LIGHT, whereby the written Word evidences its divine origin, is the impress of the majesty, authority, omniscience, truth, wisdom, holiness, justice, grace, and mercy of God, stamped upon it by the Holy Ghost, beaming on the minds of believers, and affecting them with such a sense of those perfections, both in the sublimity of the matter, and in the majestic manner becoming the Most High, as fully satisfies them that God is the speaker. Moreover,

church, to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture ; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, which is, to give all glory to God, the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God : yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts."—*Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. i. sect. v.

the impressions which are stamped upon the matter, being conveyed by the Word only, do combine with those that are made by the manner, to strengthen the evidence of the divine original of the Scriptures. The Word of God, by a manifestation of the truth, that scorns the arts of insinuation by fair and enticing words and artificial argumentation, with the like confessions of weakness, that are in all human writings, commends itself to the conscience, dives into the secret recesses of the heart, guides, teaches, directs, determines, and judges, in the name and authority of the great God. And when it thus enters, the soul is so filled with the light of the glory of those perfections, that it is constrained to cry out, The voice of God, and not of man.

8. The POWER whereby the Scripture evidences itself to be the Word of God, is just the authority and efficacy which, by means of it, he exercises over the minds and consciences of men; working in them divinely, and leaving upon them the evident marks of his glorious almighty power. It enters into the conscience, a territory exempt from the authority of creatures, and subject to God alone. It awakens, challenges, convinces, threatens; it sets the conscience a roaring, so that the whole creation cannot quiet it again. It commands a calm; and the sea, which was troubled before, is stilled so that men and devils cannot disturb its repose. It enters into the understanding; opens its eyes, fills it with a clear, purifying, and glorious light, and sets before it wonders hitherto

undiscerned, concerning God, concerning ourselves, our sin, our duty, our danger and relief ; concerning the works, the ways, the counsels and purposes of the Most High. It speaks to the will ; converts it, and disengages it from what it grasped before, so firmly, that no art or force of eloquence, no argument, fear, or hope, could make it quit its hold. It turns the bent of the will another way, yea, the opposite way ; and causes it to embrace, with open arms, what nothing before could induce it to look at. It overcomes the strongest aversion ; making the will, not only to go, but to run, after that which it hated before ; and obstinately to refuse anything else offered in its place. It enters the affections ; raises them from the earth, and gives them so divine a touch, that although, through their fickle nature, they may, at times, be carried by force another way, yet they are never at rest, until they are pointing heavenward. It comes to the soul that is sunk under the pressure of unrelievable distresses, refusing comfort, and apparently incapable of it : pulls it out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, sets its feet upon a rock, fills it with joy, yea makes it exceeding joyful, although all its outward troubles may continue, or even increase. It enters into the soul that was the willing slave of reigning lusts ; tries and condemns those powerful criminals, and causes the soul to throw off their yoke, and to join in executing the sentence upon them. Now when the power of the Word is thus

felt, how can the soul do otherwise, than fall down and acknowledge that God is in it of a truth?

9. Whereas it may be objected, Many have, for a long time, heard and read the Word, without perceiving this light, or feeling this power: are not such exempted from any obligation to believe? I answer, 1. Many who have spent their lives in studying the works of God as displayed in the visible creation, have not discerned in them the evidence of his eternal power and Godhead: yet none will affirm that on that account, they are to be excused, and want of evidence imputed to the works of creation: Romans i. 20. Why should not the case be the same, with respect to the divine Word? 2. The power by which this light is discerned, has, in all men, been greatly impaired by the fall. Many entertain unreasonable prejudices against the Scriptures; and wilfully shut their eyes against the light, whereby the power of discernment is farther weakened: others refuse to attend to the Word of God in the way that he requires of them: and hereon many are judicially blinded, and given up to the power of Satan. No wonder that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should not shine into the minds of those whom the god of this world hath blinded: 2 Cor. iv. 4. 3. No wonder that many are not affected by the clearest evidence; for God hath not given them eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to perceive (Deut. xxix. 4). To open the eyes of those who wilfully shut them, is an act of sovereign grace, which God

owes to none. 4. Light, how clear soever it may be, cannot supply the defect of the discerning power. The sun, though it shineth, cannot make the blind to see. The Word hath in it the light already described, although they who are spiritually blind, see it not. Yea, I may venture to say, that the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures, hath in it evidences more numerous, and no less discernible, of the divine perfections, and consequently of its own divine original and authority, than the whole visible creation : Psalm cxxxviii. 2. The works of creation, if they are contemplated in the due exercise of the rational powers, even by men who are not savingly enlightened, are sufficient to produce in their minds a conviction of the great Creator ; which, although it cannot command such an assent as will engage and enable them to receive the Scriptures in a due manner, to the glory of God and their own salvation, will yet, I conceive, prove sufficient to justify against them the claim of the Word to a divine original, and to deprive them of the excuse of insufficient evidence. I doubt not that many of those, who, upon conviction, testified that Christ spake as never man spake, were strangers to saving illumination ; and yet perceived, in what he said, and in his manner of saying it, so much of the stamp and impress of divinity, as drew this confession from them, and rendered them inexcusable, in not listening to him and complying with his Word. Nor do I doubt that the case will be found the same with respect to the written Word as to many ; and would

be so to all, if, without wilful prejudices, they did seriously attend to it.

10. I observe farther, that in order to engage this assent, it is not necessary that all these effects should be experienced at all times ; but that the Word should have this power, and put it forth as occasion requires and circumstances call for it.

Having thus explained our tenth proposition, we are now to prove that which is asserted in it, that "the formal reason of our obligation to believe the Scriptures, and to receive them as the Word of God, and the ground on which we so receive them, is the authority of the God of truth speaking in them, evidencing itself, by its own light and power, to our faith when duly exercised about them." Of many arguments that offer themselves, I shall restrict myself to some of the most important ; which I shall briefly propose, without insisting largely in the prosecution of them.

Argument 1. The ordinary way in which God delivers his mind in Scripture, is by declaring his will, and requiring us to believe, obey, and submit to it, on no other evidence but his own testimony ; "Thus saith the Lord."

Arg. 2. To enable his people to distinguish his Word from the pretended revelations of the false prophets, he referred them to the evidence of its own light and power : Jeremiah xxiii. 26-29, "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies ? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of

their own heart ; who think to cause my people to forget my name, by their dreams which they tell, every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream ; and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat ? saith the Lord. Is not my Word like as a fire ? saith the Lord ; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces ?" This was in the latter days of the ancient church, when the people were in greatest danger of being deceived by false prophets : yet God lays their safety or ruin, both temporal and eternal, on their discerning aright between his word and theirs. And to shew the reasonableness of this, he intimates that his Word may be distinguished from impostures, as easily as wheat from chaff : and that it will discover itself by its own properties of light, heat, and power, like the fire, and like the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.

Arg. 3. When farther evidence, such as that of miracles, was required, it was refused, as what was unnecessary, and would prove ineffectual. This is clearly taught, by our Lord, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus ; Luke xvi. 24-31. The rich man, disappointed of relief to himself, and desirous to prevent the ruin of his brethren, proposes to Abraham that Lazarus should be sent from the dead, to convince them of the reality of things eternal. "I pray thee therefore, father," says he, "that thou wouldst send him to my father's house : for I have five

brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Here the case is plain. The rich man desires a miracle to satisfy his brethren. He is denied this, and remitted to Moses and the prophets as sufficient. He insists ; and pleads that a miracle would be more convincing. This is still refused ; and it is plainly taught, that men who will not hear the Word of God, will not be persuaded by miracles.

Arg. 4. In the fourteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians, which treats of spiritual gifts, and their comparative usefulness to the church ; particularly the miraculous gift of tongues, and the ordinary gift of prophecy, or preaching the Word ; the latter is preferred to the former, not only for the edification of believers, but also for the conviction of unbelievers ; in which, the manner of its operation, which is specified, is no other than its evidencing itself to be of God, by its own light and power. Let the whole passage be considered, but especially the 24th and 25th verses : " But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all : and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ; and so, falling

down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

Arg. 5. The constant practice of the apostles, fully proves our assertion. In order to persuade the unbelieving world, they did not prove the truth of their doctrine by the arguments which are now commonly insisted on, or by working miracles, or by referring to miracles formerly wrought by them : but, by manifestation of the truth, and demanding acceptance of it in the name of God, they commended themselves to every man's conscience in his sight. By this means they converted the world. And when their message was rejected, they shook off the dust of their feet for a testimony against the unbelievers ; who were thereby laid open to our Lord's awful threatening, of punishment more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Arg. 6. Our assertion is farther confirmed by the experience of those who believe aright. Believers of all sorts, learned and unlearned, however they may, by other means and arguments, be capacitated to deal with adversaries, and fortified against their objections, do yet agree in resting their own minds upon the Word of God, as it evidences itself to their faith by its own light and power. The unlearned, for the most part, are capable of no other evidence : and yet, upon this alone, in all ages, in life and in death, in adhering to the truth, and cheerfully suffering for it, they have exhibited a firmness and stability to which, without it, the most learned could never attain.

Without this evidence, divine faith, resting on divine testimony, is impossible ; and the vulgar, who are incapable of any other, must wander in uncertainty, and pin their faith on the sleeves of their teachers. But, blessed be God, here is a ground that cannot fail. He speaketh : and, notwithstanding their simplicity, for which they are despised by the world, " his sheep hear his voice, and follow him ; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of a stranger," John x. 4, 5.

PROPOSITION XI.

Whereas it may be pretended, that on supposition of what has been stated in the foregoing Proposition, the people of God, at such times as they discern not this light, and feel not this power, in reading or hearing particular portions of Scripture, have no ground for their faith with respect to those passages : in answer to that objection, I offer this proposition : That to persons capable of discerning the evidence of divine authority, duly applying themselves, in the way of the Lord's appointment, in so far as, in compliance with their duty, they are at present concerned to understand, believe, and obey any particular portion of the Word ; and reaching the true meaning of it ; there is no part of Scripture, in so far as God speaketh in it, which doth not sufficiently evidence its authority in its season.

As this objection hath sometimes appeared very

formidable to myself, I shall, as far as intended brevity will permit, distinctly propose the grounds whereon I was satisfied about the truth of the proposition which I have offered in answer to it: referring to the preceding chapter, for farther clearing as to the way wherein the Lord quieted me, and relieved me from objections.

1. By the fall of man, his faith, or power of assenting to truth upon testimony, was corrupted: and although, in common with his other faculties, it is renewed in believers, who receive from the Lord an understanding whereby they discern his voice from that of a stranger; yet this renovation being but in part, their faith is habitually weak, and they know but in part. That they may live to God in a due manner, this weakness engages them to cry daily to him to increase their faith, and to carry on "the work of faith with power." Besides this habitual weakness, the faith of believers, in this imperfect state, is liable to various incidental disorders, arising from outward and inward occasions: from the restless power of indwelling corruptions, which raise many fogs and damps to overcloud the soul; and from the violence of outward temptations, which Satan and the world, through the wise permission of God for the exercise of their faith, throngs in upon them. By such things as these, their darkness is increased, their faith weakened, or at least straitened in its exercise, and their spiritual discernment more or less obstructed. Now if, at such seasons, the believer is unable to dis-

cern, to his comfort, the evidence of divine authority in the Word, even where it shines most brightly, he has no reason to abandon the Word, complaining of its want of evidence ; but rather has reason to be exercised, as believers in such a case usually are, in complaining of his own darkness. *Vitium est in organo.* The fault is not in the Word, but in the discerning power. The same argument would prove that there is no light in the sun.

2. Through the power of corruption, and the force of temptation, the Lord's people often become negligent and inadvertent ; not applying their minds, nor inclining their hearts, unto the Word, with the attention that is necessary in order to discern the evidence of God in it. As a punishment for this, God withdraws, and leaves them under the darkness into which they are hereby cast : and then, when God passeth by, before or behind, on the right hand or on the left, and worketh round about them, they cannot perceive him. If we turn our backs, or shut our eyes, or neglect to remove the motes that obstruct our sight, no wonder we do not discern the light. When we have idols in our hearts, no wonder we see not God. If we lay not aside the filthiness of our hearts, we cannot receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save our souls. James i. 21.

3. Although the whole Scriptures are to be received as the Word of God, it doth not follow that every proposition which they contain, considered by itself, is to be so received. The Scripture contains men's

words, and the devil's words ; which are often false and pernicious. These are to be received, on the divine authority, not as the Word of God, but as the words of the persons to whom they are ascribed. The Scripture testifies to nothing more than the truth of God in the historical narration of them ; which is all that we are required to believe.

4. Albeit every divine truth which God speaketh, hath equal authority and sufficient evidence, yet the evidence of every truth is not equally clear and affecting. The Scripture is like the visible heaven, another piece of divine workmanship, which is filled with stars, each giving light ; although not equally clear, powerful, and glorious, yet sufficient to answer the use for which it was designed, and to satisfy the discerning and attentive beholder, that it is light. There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars ; for star differeth from star in glory : and the greater lights, if they are at a sufficient distance, like the fixed stars, affect us less than the smaller lights, the moon and planets, which are nearer. There are some truths contained in Scripture, to which, although they are useful in their own place and connexion, the divine testimony is comparatively of minor importance to us. These are either such as are in some measure known or knowable by us without revelation, or such as bear less directly on our eternal interests ; yet, in order to our security in walking with God, it was necessary that they should be proposed to us on the faith of divine testi-

mony. There are other truths, more important in themselves, and bearing more directly on our salvation, in which our present concern is more apparent, and which, therefore, make a deeper and more lasting impression upon us. Now it must be allowed, that truths of the latter sort have an evidence more bright, sensible, and affecting, than those of the former.

5. Hereon several subordinate observations offer themselves, which are of the greatest importance for clearing the difficulty under consideration. 1. Truths which otherwise are, in some respects, within our reach, but are stamped with the authority of Scripture, in order to the stability of our faith, in so far as we are, in practice, obliged to lay weight on them ; cannot be supposed to affect our minds so discernibly, as truths of a different kind ; inasmuch as it is difficult to distinguish this additional evidence, from that which we have for them otherwise. Moreover, God, who doth nothing in vain, seeing we are more easily induced to believe them, and less liable to temptations which may shake our faith, sees it not meet to stamp upon them such lively and affecting impressions of himself. 2. On the other hand, those propositions which disclose the secret purposes of the Most High, and other things which, without revelation, are beyond the reach of any mortal, or perhaps of any created understanding, must needs make a more vivid impression ; as illuminating the mind with a knowledge to which it must otherwise have ever remained a stranger. 3. In like manner, truths wherein our eternal salva-

tion, or our present relief from incumbent trouble, is directly concerned, affect us more powerfully than others which lie more remote from present use, how profitable soever they may be in their own place. The moon that guides me in the night, affects me more sensibly than the sun which is then out of view : although the moon has comparatively no light ; and what she appears to have, is derived from the sun. In like manner, truths which are suited to our present case, although they are, in themselves, of less importance, and derive all their glory from others, affect us more deeply than truths of more importance, and their evidence appears greater. Every thing is beautiful in its season. We know from historical evidence that there was such a city as Jerusalem. This fact, however, being incidentally recorded in Scripture, we believe it on the testimony of the Word, which is an additional security. Hereon our minds are not so illuminated and affected, as they are when God proclaims to us that he is, in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. This truth, which is discovered to us by revelation alone, fills our minds with a sense of the divine glory before unknown ; and consequently affects us more deeply. Again, when we are perplexed about through-bearing in some particular strait, a promise of grace to help us, though it is of less importance in itself than the fore-mentioned discovery of reconciliation, and derives from it all its light and efficacy, yet, coming in the season wherein we are wholly exercised as above, affects us more. 4. Where the same truth

is discerned at the same time by different lights, such as the light of nature, human testimony, and divine revelation, it requires both attention and discernment to distinguish their respective influence; although each of them has its own particular use, which would appear by the defect that would be felt upon its extinction.

6. With respect to truths of high importance, which affect our minds with the enriching discovery of what was before unknown, or not knowable without revelation; or truths which do strongly affect us with a sense of the divine authority, by their suitableness to our case and exercise at the time; there is no difficulty, save in such cases as those which are to be noticed afterwards.

7. With respect to truths of minor importance, which relate to matters not so remote from our own apprehensions, or not so suitable to our present circumstances, it is acknowledged, that even real Christians, accustomed to the exercise of faith, are not, in reading or hearing them, affected with so clear and sensible an evidence of God, as in reading or hearing Scriptures of a different kind. This difference arises from the nature of the truths themselves, the design of God and his manner in delivering them, our present circumstances, the imperfection and weakness of our faith, our incidental indisposition at the time, and other causes which may be easily collected from what has been hinted in the course of the preceding observations.

8. Notwithstanding all this, the least considerable truth in Scripture bears a sufficient evidence of divine authority ; that is, an evidence which answers the design of God, determines the believer's assent, and lays him under obligation to obey or submit. This evidence, being every way suited to the scope of the passage, the importance of the matter, and the weight that is to be laid upon it ; although, for such reasons as those that have been mentioned, it may not always be equally discernible, yet, in its proper season, it is observed by judicious and reflecting Christians. For instance, when any of those truths that may appear least in importance is questioned, whether by men or by Satan, the authority of God so awes the conscience of a believer, that he dares not part with the least shred of divine truth ; but adheres to it in spite of all opposition, though it may cost him his life. And, when any particular truth comes to be applied, by the Spirit of God, to the scope at which it is aimed in the Word, it is accompanied by such evidence, as not only determines the believer's assent and adherence, but emboldens him to lay that stress upon it which the case requires.

9. Whereas some truths, for reasons already given, do not admit of so clear and bright an evidence as others ; in order to prevent our faith from being shaken, or at least from failing, the wisdom and goodness of God have, in various ways, provided for our security : as, 1. Though in certain propositions, when viewed apart by themselves, the evidence may be less

apparent, yet, when viewed in connexion with the scope of the passage, as intended by the divine Author, there often appears a beaming light. 2. Other passages related to them, which have a more distinct evidence of God, are joined with them, or placed near them ; which relation, on being perceived, strengthens the evidence : and I conceive there may be an eye to this, where doctrinal passages are inserted in Scripture history. 3. In some truths it is directly asserted that God is the speaker. Many examples of this occur in the books of Moses ; wherein it is expressly declared, that what is enjoined, is by the particular command of God. 4. The objection chiefly respects the Old Testament : the divine authority of which, is secured by plain and evident testimonies in the New. 5. Believers being in general accustomed to read the Word of God under a solemn sense of his authority, will not easily be induced to entertain a suspicion, that a book in which God is so manifestly concerned, and which, in the main, he acknowledges to be from himself, is, or can be, with the permission of his providence, corrupted by the interpolation of grosser matter : and therefore they will rather question themselves, and acknowledge their own ignorance, than doubt the divine authority of the whole. .

10. Although no faulty obscurity is chargeable on the Scriptures, in which every thing is clearly revealed that is, in present circumstances, of absolute necessity to believers, in order to their acceptable walking with God ; yet they contain many truths not understood

by all, or perhaps by any ; which have been inserted on purpose to exercise the diligence and to try the faith of Christians, as well as for other wise ends. Now it is evident, that until the Spirit of God open to us, in the use of appointed means, the meaning of those passages, we cannot perceive their light and power. But whenever they are opened to us, the same light that discovers the meaning, will not fail to affect us with a sense of divine light, authority, and power, that will make our hearts burn within us. Of this, the experience of God's people, as they grow in knowledge, furnishes them daily with new instances : for which reason, they stumble not at the want of present light ; but, encouraged by the wonders which they discern in other parts of the Word, they are quickened to diligence, and excited to earnest prayer, that their eyes may be opened to see the wonders that may be concealed under those parts which are yet obscure.

11. The Word of God, being intended for the use of the whole church, and every member of it, in all stations, relations, temptations, cases, and circumstances, in which any of them are, have been, or may be placed, contains truths designed for, and suited to, different persons, in different circumstances. Now, what God speaketh to one, cannot be so affecting to another, who, though he may discern the Lord's voice, is not in the same case : and the same may be said of the same person with respect to different cases.

12. It must be kept in mind, that although every

part of Scripture hath, in its proper place and degree, sufficient evidence of divine authority, yet the actual discerning of that evidence, depends very much upon the present state of the discerning power ; which, according as it may be stronger or weaker, more or less free from accidental indispositions and outward temptations, and applied in a more or less orderly manner to the observation of the evidence, may either not perceive it at all, or may discern it more or less clearly.

13. Yet whereas they who are once renewed by the grace of God, do continue to be children of light, having a spiritual capacity to discern the Lord's voice from that of a stranger, they do, in general, find in the Scriptures, the authority of God evidencing itself suitably to the exigence of their particular cases. When the truths that occur are such as do not affect present faith or practice, or, by their abstract nature, and the connexion in which they stand, require no more than a bare assent ; where the truths are not attacked by enemies, or where there is no immediate call to hazard much upon them : in these and similar cases, although they make not so powerful an impression, yet, one way or other, as much of the divine authority shines in them, as is sufficient to engage the adherence and reverence which are due to the oracles of God. When the truths are of a different nature, and of more importance, when they are suited to present necessities, when they require more distinct actings of faith or obedience, and call for more stress

to be laid upon them ; in that case, the evidence of God shines more brightly. And scarcely ever will a discerning and attentive Christian, who is not grievously indisposed by some casual disorder, read any considerable part of Scripture, but somewhere or other, in the scope, or in particular words and propositions, or their contexture, some light will shine in upon the soul, enforcing a conviction, that God is in it of a truth.

14. When the faith of the Lord's people is assaulted as to the truth of the Word ; when they are called, in difficult cases and duties, to lay great stress upon it, and, as it were, to hazard their all for it ; when they are distressed by violent temptations, and stand in need of comfort ; when they are under spiritual decays, and God designs to restore them ; when they are newly brought in, and need to be confirmed ; when they are humble and diligent, and the Lord intends to reward them graciously, and encourage them to go on ; when they are at a loss to discover the path of duty, in cases of more than usual importance, and are waiting on the Lord for light ; when the Lord designs to carry them on to high degrees of grace and holiness, and employ them in special services : in a word, whenever any extraordinary exigence calls for it ; then the Lord opens the eyes of his people, fixes their attention, removes whatever intercepts the discoveries of his mind, speaks the Word to them distinctly, powerfully, and sweetly ; and thereby gives them such a taste of his goodness, wisdom, and power,

with such an experience of his authority in the Word, and of his gracious design in its present application, as fills their souls with the riches of the full assurance of faith, peace, joy, and steadfastness in believing.

PROPOSITION XII:

Whereas, by reason of various readings in the ancient manuscripts of the original Scriptures, and passages wrong translated in our versions, it may be pretended that we are in danger of being imposed upon by propositions which are not of divine authority: I assert, that the ground of faith, laid down in the preceding pages, is sufficient for the satisfaction of Christians, in so far as their own cases and temptations are concerned. To clear this a little, I offer the following remarks:

1. Although it must be granted, that to those who are capable of it, the use of the original languages is more satisfactory; yet, where the authority of God evidenceth itself to believers in the way above described, (and, as all real Christians know by experience, this is the case with all those truths which are of greatest importance, and immediately concern their faith or obedience), they have a sure foundation for their faith, whether they use the originals or translations.

2. In truths of any considerable importance, our faith is not left to rest upon a single testimony. The wisdom of God has provided against this, by repeating them on a variety of occasions, and by clearing

and confirming their connexion with other truths ; as well as by the analogy of faith, or current of the Scriptures with respect to his principal design in the whole. We are therefore in no danger of being deprived of any truth which is of consequence to our faith or practice, by alleged corruptions of the text, or wrong translations. It is remarked by the famous Dr Owen, who had considered all the various readings, and who well knew the failures of particular translations, that if all the various readings were added to the worst and most faulty translation, the church of God would not sustain by it the loss of one important truth.

3. Since difficulties of this kind began to trouble the church, the wise God hath stirred up many learned men to devote their labour to the solution of them. By consulting their writings, or by applying to such ministers of the gospel as are skilful in those matters, with dependence on the Lord for his blessing, any one who is particularly concerned to know the right reading or the right translation of a passage, may attain to satisfaction about it. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, John vii. 17.

4. Persons who are called to such exercise (which rarely befalls the vulgar sort of Christians), are seldom without access to such means. But if they should be so, the Lord can easily relieve them, by evidencing his authority to the conscience in a satisfying light, or by enabling them to wait for light till the solution

come, or by removing the temptation when it becomes too strong, or by leading them to rest in the particular truth as secured by other passages, or by some other like way.

5. The difficulty as to translations, is really of less importance ; and as to the alleged corruption of the text, ordinary Christians, whose consciences are habitually affected by a sense of the Lord's authority in his Word, and who are daily engaged in attending to his voice in it, speaking to them, and conveying to their souls divine influences of light, life, and comfort, will not be prone to entertain a suspicion so unworthy of God, as that he would permit a book, which he acknowledges as his own Word, to impose upon them, under pretence of his authority, doctrines of human invention, injurious to their faith or obedience.

6. I shall make but one observation more ; that enemies trust more to bringing forward their pretended corruptions *in cumulo*, in a bulky shape, to alarm Christians who are capable of entertaining such objections, than to insisting on particular instances. Their want of success in the latter method, discovers the weakness of the objection. If there are such readings as would materially alter the text, why are they not produced, and proved to be of equal authority with the received readings? Others are of no consequence ; these only are to be regarded. Of this kind, there are very few that dare be brought forward ; and those few have been disproved by writers

of equal capacity and learning. But to take leave of this subject, which is above the ordinary sort of Christians, the Lord's people, to whom he has evidenced his authority in the way described above, will be moved by none of these things. They will not abandon the Scripture ; but will, as they have good reason to do, respect it as the Word of God, and hold it fast as the charter of eternal life.

CONCLUSION.

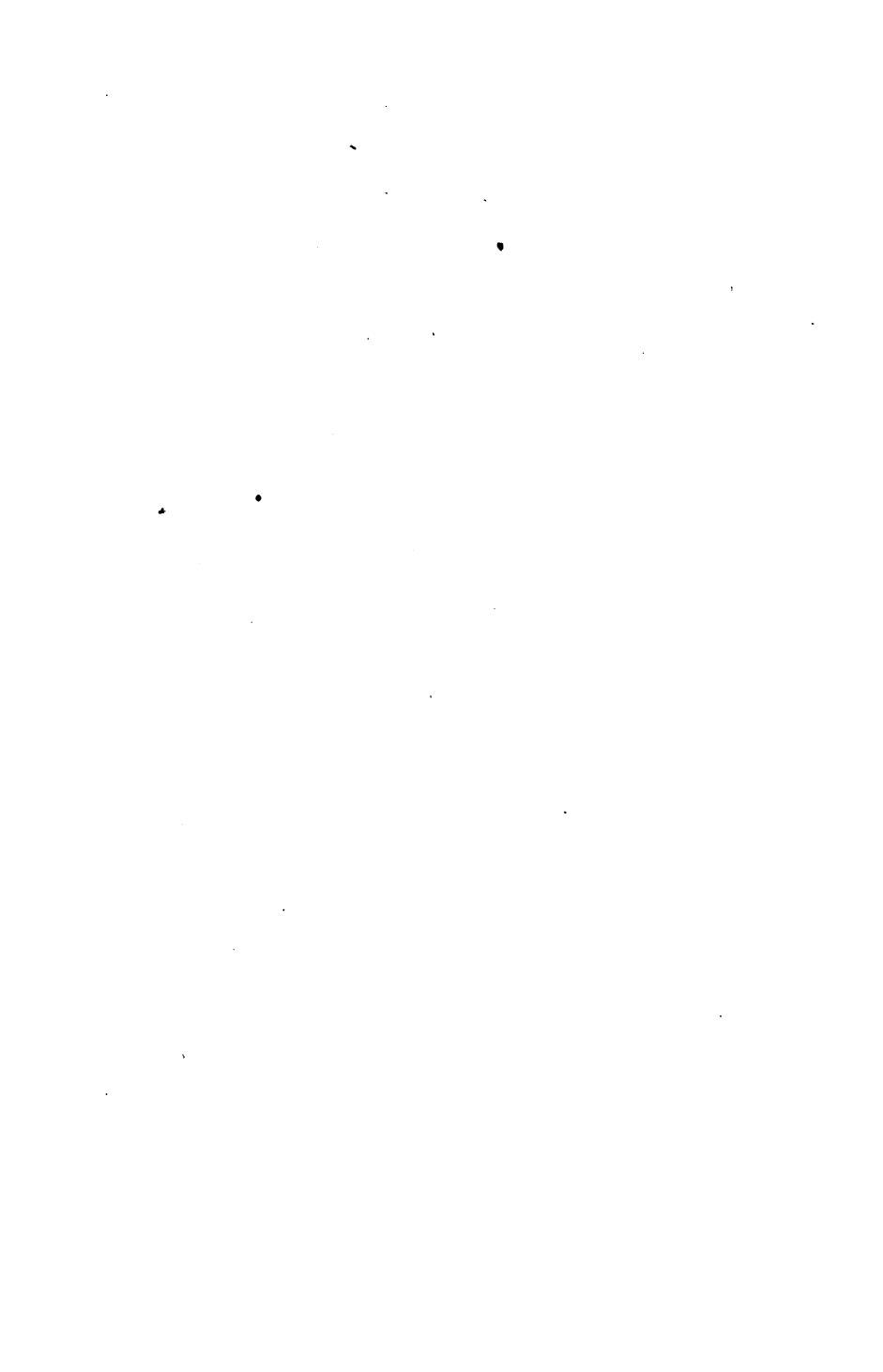
From the whole subject, I shall make these observations :

1. How justly may divine faith be called infallible ; resting, as it doth, upon the faithfulness and truth of God in his Word ! Sometimes, through darkness we may not discern, through negligence may not observe, or through the force of interposing temptations may lose sight of, this evidence. But while our faith is fixed on this foundation, although it may waver, it cannot fail. The ground is firm. The Scripture cannot be broken, John .x. 35.

2. This reason of faith, is equally accessible to the most learned and judicious divine, and to the meanest and most illiterate Christian, who knows nothing of the props by which the faith of others is supported. Hence it is, that the latter cleaves as firmly to the Word, and hazards for it all that is dear to him, yea life itself, with as much courage and cheerfulness as the former, and sometimes with much more. This is unaccountable on any other ground.

3. In answer to the objections against this ground of faith, let the following things be considered. 1. The Scripture being a relief provided by sovereign grace, for those of the fallen race of man to whom God intendeth to shew mercy, it was so written as to leave room for the discovery of divine sovereignty, and for the subordinate means which were to be employed ; wherefore, it was not adjusted, in all respects, to the capacity of man in his fallen state, so as to exclude the agency of the Holy Spirit, and of the gospel ministry. 2. Although the Word is our only rule, it is not our only guide : for God hath also given us the Holy Spirit, who teacheth by the Word, as he seeth meet. 3. The Word being a rule intended for all ages, it was not necessary that what concerneth one generation, should be equally clear to all other generations. It is sufficient that what concerneth every particular age, be so clear, that people living at the time, may, in the use of the means which are appointed of God, attain to the knowledge of that which concerneth themselves. 4. The Word being designed for persons of all stations and capacities, in every different case, each ought to be satisfied with the distinct knowledge of what, in the way of duty, is required of himself ; though he cannot discern so clearly what concerns others. 5. The Scriptures are not systematically arranged under distinct heads, but digested in another method, in order to leave room for the conduct of the Spirit, to excite the diligence of Christians in the study of the whole, and for other

reasons which are obvious to infinite wisdom. 6. There are difficulties in the Word of God, and things hard to be understood, which are designed, not only to exercise the faith, humility, and dependence, of the Lord's people, but also, though without prejudice to the perfection of the Scripture, to prove stones of stumbling and rocks of offence, to those who, being disobedient, obstinately stumble at the Word. To some he speaketh in parables, that seeing, they may not see : but wisdom is justified of her own children. 2 Peter iii. 16 ; 1 Peter ii. 8 ; Luke vii. 35, viii. 10.



ESSAY II.

*A MODEST ENQUIRY, WHETHER
REGENERATION OR JUSTIFICATION
HAS THE PRECEDENCY, IN ORDER
OF NATURE.*

ESSAY II.

I. THE QUESTION STATED.

THE question is, Whether justification, which compriseth forgiveness of sin, absolution from guilt, and gracious acceptance of our persons, doth, in order of nature, precede the renovation of our natures by the Spirit of Christ, the implantation of supernatural habits of grace, a principle of life, or the new creature? Or, on the other hand, Whether elect sinners are first renewed, regenerated, and furnished with a principle of life; which, being excited through the influence of the Spirit of life, accepts of Christ in the gospel offer; whereon justification follows, in the same instant of time, yet consequent in order of nature?

II. DIFFICULTIES ON EITHER HAND.

1. If regeneration be held to precede justification, the following difficulties occur.

How is it consistent with the wisdom and righteousness of God, to impart his image to a sinner who is yet under the curse? This respects the act of God, and seems to fix an incongruity on him.

How can it be conceived that a soul, yet under the wrath and curse of God, should be dignified with his image ? This seems to be inconsistent with the nature of the things themselves, and the order to which it leads.

Does not this make the object of justification to be a holy renewed saint, and not (according to Rom. iv. 5) an ungodly sinner ?

How can the soul be partaker of spiritual life, before its union with Christ the fountain of life ? Union is by faith, whereby we come to Christ for life ; but this appears to be unnecessary, if we have life before union.

Does not this make the giving of the Spirit antecedent to union and faith ? And yet we receive the Spirit by faith : Gal. iii. 14.

Does not this suppose the heart to be purified before faith, while yet it is purified by faith ? Acts xv. 9.

Is not the new creature begotten by the immortal seed of the Word ? And can the Word operate in any other way than by the intervention of faith ?

2. On the other hand, if justification be said to precede, the difficulties are many. I need not repeat them at length ; only,

How will this accord with the doctrine of the Reformed Churches and Divines, that harmoniously teach the contrary ? And how does it agree with our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, to which we sign an assent ? Particularly where they treat of effectual calling ?

How can we conceive the acts of life, where there is no abiding principle from whence they should proceed ? The acts of faith, without the Spirit of faith ?

How can we understand that an unrenewed soul should be the subject of this noblest act of faith, by which we are justified (I speak of it objectively), by which we are united to Christ, and interested in him and all his benefits ?

Whereas the exercise of justifying faith, implies many actings in all the faculties ; how can it be understood, that the whole soul, with all its powers, should, before it is renewed, harmoniously and uniformly go out toward the Lord ; assenting to the record concerning him, approving him, chusing him, and resting in him ?

Can the best fruit be produced without a root ?

These difficulties, and many such that are commonly alleged, might be insisted on : but those that have been given, may serve for a specimen.

III. A SCHEME OF PRINCIPLES EXHIBITED, FOR THE VINDICATION OF THE COMMONLY RECEIVED OPINION ; THAT REGENERATION, IN ORDER OF NATURE, PRECEDES JUSTIFICATION ; ALTHOUGH IT IS AGREED ON ALL HANDS, THAT THEY TAKE PLACE AT THE SAME TIME.

PROPOSITION I.

A design being laid in the decree of God, to save elect sinners, to the praise of his grace, by Jesus Christ ; they were given to him in the Covenant of

Redemption. By an act of sovereignty, the law of works was relaxed ; not simply, as to its obligation to doing or suffering, but in so far as it respected man himself as the subject of that obligation. Nor was the law relaxed, simply as it obliged men, even elect sinners, to obey ; but in so far as it obliged them to obey in order to exemption from the curse, and a title to life. And he to whom elect sinners were thus given, was, by the designation of the Father, and his own consent, substituted for elect sinners ; thereby coming under an obligation to answer the demands of the law, as to what it required of them in order to avoid the curse and obtain the promised blessings. Or briefly, he became obliged, in their stead, to fulfil its demands, as it was a covenant. Moreover, he undertook, as Mediator, to purchase for them by the price of his own blood, complete redemption, with all things necessary to it.

Corollary. My design does not require a minute statement of the foregoing truths, which are generally acknowledged among the orthodox : only I observe, that from the purpose of the Father, his gift of elect sinners to Christ, his substitution of Christ in their place, and Christ's consent, there doth result some relation between him and them, which may as fitly be designed by the name Union, as by any other word that occurs to me. This, I grant, is not that complete mystical union, whereby we are actually grafted into him, as branches into a tree. Whether it should be called a legal or federal, fundamental or fountain

union, as our divines differently term it, I am not concerned : yet certain it is that such a relation exists, and that it is the fountain of all subsequent advantages to the elect.

PROPOSITION II.

This relaxation of the law, in favour of the original subjects of its obligation, with the substitution of Christ in their place, being, in the purpose of God, and in the Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son, expressly designed for those who were given of the Father ; it plainly follows, that immediately upon Christ's yielding the satisfaction demanded, or his engagement to do so, (which, in his case, was equivalent,) there did result a right for them, to all the benefits of his purchase. This right is what lawyers call *Jus ad rem.* ; not *Jus in re.* It is more proper to say there is a right for them, than that they have a right. Since it is not known to them, nor actually vested in their persons, it is not actionable by them. Yet with God it is righteous, that they for whom redemption is purchased, should be put in possession of it, at the time and in the order agreed upon. The use of this will appear in due time.*

The foundation of this assertion lies in this plain Scripture truth ; that although the ultimate design of all, was the glory of the adorable Trinity, yet the

* See Owen's Death of Death, page 68, and Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, Appendix, page 30.

principal subordinate end, the proper and immediate design, of the Father and the Son, was the salvation of sinners. The designation of Christ to the mediatory office, with his undertaking and execution of it, being pursuant to the purpose of God with respect to the salvation of sinners, had no remote respect to them, but primarily aimed at their salvation. Christ's undertaking, with his exhibition in the flesh, his obedience, and his death, whether considered as a satisfaction, an atonement, a price or a ransom, was for the redemption of persons. It was not to obtain liberty for the Father, without injury to his justice, or to obtain a right for the Son, on what terms he pleased, to bestow salvation on whom he saw meet. It was not the impetration of the effects absolutely, but the salvation of lost sinners by them, that was primarily in view. The Scripture speaks not of the absolute procurement of these things, but constantly includes a direct respect to sinners, to their personal advantage. The Father sent the Son, and the Son came, to save them that were lost. Our sins were laid on him. He was made a curse for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He was made Lord of the dead and the living, or, which is the same thing, he had power given him over all flesh, that he might give eternal life to as many as were given him of the Father. In a word, they, whoever they were, for whom Christ died, (of which we dispute not now), being in the design, and all being

for them, with a direct and immediate respect to their advantage, a right must result for them.

This is opposed by universalists, because it undermines the foundation of their whole fabric : for they teach, in opposition to what the whole tenor of Scripture uniformly testifies, that the effect wherein the death of Christ, as a satisfaction, ransom, or price, did terminate, was the procurement or impetration of the things, and not the advantage of persons by the application of them. The charge of Antinomianism will be answered by the next proposition.

PROPOSITION III.

Pardon, absolution from guilt, and all saving blessings, were purchased by Christ, *sub termino*: that is, it was agreed in the contract whereby Christ was constituted Surety and Mediator, that those blessings should be actually given out to each of them for whom they were respectively designed, in their several generations, in the season and order prefixed by God : to the praise of his glorious grace.

Cor. 1. Hence we see that the elect can lay no claim to anything on account of Christ's satisfaction or purchase, except at the time and in the order agreed on. Till that time, therefore, considered in themselves, they are in no better case than others.

Cor. 2. Hence also we learn the true reason, that they for whom satisfaction has been made, do yet continue, for a time, under the wrath or curse of God,

as well as others. It is not, as Baxter fondly supposes, because Christ paid not the *idem*, the same in kind, that was due from sinners : but because all those privileges being contrived and provided by a concert between the Father and the Son, without the knowledge of the sinner, or any contribution of counsel, performance, or consent, from him, it did belong, by the best of rights, to the authors of them, to bestow them at what time, and in what order, they pleased ; which was accordingly fixed in the Covenant of Redemption.

PROPOSITION IV.

Christ Jesus the Mediator, immediately upon the performance of what was required of him, was fully discharged ; and as Trustee appointed by the Father, and Head of those who were given to him, invested, for their behoof, with the management of the right already spoken of. This right, which was purchased for them, and confirmed to them, by his blood, was, till the time of their actual investiture, lodged in the hand of the righteousness and faithfulness of God. And now, as Trustee aforesaid, he hath access, in the order and at the respective terms agreed upon, to make his claim for the outgiving of the purchased privileges, and the actual investing of the persons with the right to them. To crave this, in due season, at the hand of the righteousness and faithfulness of God, is the design of his intercession ; or appearing

in the Holiest with his own blood, which is the ground of his claim. This trust he executeth faithfully. The faithful Advocate never fails to put in his claim in, due season.

Cor. This discharge of our debt to our Surety, although it is not our Justification properly and strictly so called, yet, because it was for us that he suffered and paid the ransom, is not unfitly termed by our divines, (Charnock, Witsius, &c.), our fundamental or general Justification. The right and privileges purchased and confirmed by his death, were for us. The provision made for the conveyance of that right and those privileges, respects us ; and the conveyance of right and possession, is hereby absolutely secured ; though meanwhile, till the term agreed on come, we are, in ourselves, as we were before.

PROPOSITION V.

When the term draws on, that was prefixed for the actual outgiving of privileges, it is so ordered, that the elect soul is summoned, at the instance of the law and justice of God, for his violation of the law. The charge is enforced on his conscience. Through the Spirit's influence joining with the Word, God is revealed, seated as Judge. His presence, majesty, holiness, and justice, are realized to the sinner, who now stands in this lower court, at God's tribunal erected there. He is beat from all the denials,

pleas, extenuations, shifts, and evasions, that he can devise ; and stands before God, self-convicted and silenced.

PROPOSITION VI.

If sentence should pass while matters do stand thus, it must unavoidably be a sentence of condemnation. The charge is proved ; the libel is relevant ; all pleas are justly repelled, nay, they are passed from by the panel himself. But the term being now come, the faithful Advocate, who will lose none that are his, steps in, appears in the higher house whither he is entered with his own blood, and puts in his claim on behalf of the criminal arraigned before God's tribunal below. Whether this claim be made in words, I inquire not ; but it is to this purpose : "This poor criminal was thine by creation ; thy prisoner by his rebellion ; but thou gavest him to me. I bare for him the curse of the law ; behold my wounds ! I purchased for him all saving blessings ; lo, there is my blood ! the price of redemption. The term is come. I crave, therefore, in consideration of what I have done and suffered for him, that he be acquitted ; that grace be given to enable him to put in his claim at the bar where he now stands personally convicted ; and that thereon he be absolved, accepted, and entered into orderly possession of all purchased privileges." Christ's appearance for us in the holiest, must be allowed to import no less, by all who own the orthodox doctrines of

Christ's oblation and intercession, with their relation to each other.

Cor. Christ's intercession, although it is represented as a prayer, is not strictly so. In so far as concerneth himself, it is a claim of right ; but out of regard to the majesty of the Judge, it is, like other legal claims, managed in the form of a prayer, or what is equivalent thereto. Or rather it is represented after this manner in condescension to our capacity ; the way of transacting things in heaven, between the glorious Judge and Advocate, being above our reach.

PROPOSITION VII.

This plea being made above, on behalf of the sinner convicted at God's tribunal below, is admitted : and the admission of it, in what manner soever it is done, imports a reckoning of Christ to the criminal ; or an acknowledgment that his undertaking respected the sinner who is now pursued by the law before God's tribunal on earth ; and an acknowledgment of the sinner's right to absolution on account of satisfaction made, and to all other privileges on account of the price paid : in consideration of which, (I speak after our manner of conceiving and expressing what is above our reach,) order is given out for putting him in actual possession.

This is what Dr Owen calls absolution in heaven before believing : and is, as it were, a second step, moment, instant, or, as Witsius calls it, *articulus*, of

the sinner's justification. But this, being of great moment for clearing the difficulties above mentioned, must be illustrated and confirmed. Observe then,

1. Though this, in order of nature, precedes any grace in the sinner ; yet regeneration, believing, and justification, all take place at the same instant of time.

2. Although, in our way of expressing the deep things of God, and for our more easy conception, we are obliged to think and speak of each of these as distinct acts, yet we pretend not to determine the manner in which they are done.

3. This is no new or singular opinion. Many of our old divines have gone farther in their expressions ; but what we have pleaded for, is no more than the native consequence of acknowledged truths before laid down. Dr Owen, who was remote enough from novelties, asserts it at length, and defends it against Baxter, in his discourse of the Death of Christ (page 68, &c.), and Appendix to *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ* : and Witsius pleads for it, in his *Dissertationes Irenicæ*, (Cap. 110).

4. To the confirmation given to this opinion by the foregoing propositions, which unavoidably lead to it, we may add the following things. This is the order to which we are directed by Scripture. Rom viii. 32, Christ is first delivered for us ; then given to us ; then, with him, all other things. 2 Peter i. 1, the giving out of the first grace, namely faith, is declared to be an act of righteousness. The saints are said to have obtained precious faith, through the righteousness of God ; which can no otherwise be, but in con-

sideration of the right obtained by Christ, and as it proceeds upon an antecedent admission of that right on their behalf. Philip. i. 29, it is expressly asserted, that it is given unto us to believe, on the behalf of Christ, or for his sake. Now this imports, that in giving it, God has a regard to what Christ did for them; in consideration of which, he gives it as that which is of right due. How comes the grace of faith, for example, to be given, for Christ's sake, to Peter and not to Judas? Is it not, that God looks upon Christ as standing under another relation to Peter than to Judas? And what is that, but to reckon him to the one and not to the other? Dr Owen adds, that this may perhaps be what is meant in Rom. iv. 5, by the justification of the ungodly: but as he is not peremptory, so neither shall I be so.

5. This, however, is not the sinner's Justification; although it is a step towards it, and issues in it. It is not so called, at least usually, in Scripture. Although it is a sentence passed by God himself, it is not passed in the court where the sinner now stands personally arraigned. It terminates not on the person of the sinner; and, to speak after our manner, it is no more than a warrant for the outgiving of grace, to put the sinner in case to make his plea in the court where he now stands convicted. Till this be done, which, I acknowledge, is at the very same instant, the sinner is, in himself, as he was before.

Cor. This reckoning of Christ to us, is a second step or advancement towards the complete union that is designed.

PROPOSITION VIII.

This act being passed in favour of him who, knowing nothing of it, now stands trembling at the bar, is instantly executed. The Spirit of Christ takes possession of the soul, and creates a principle of grace therein. In the wise and exact providence of the Most High, Christ in the promise, is held forth as the ordinance of God for the salvation of sinners, and particularly as the propitiation; and, through the enlightening, enlivening, and quickening influence of the same Spirit, the poor sinner himself, at that very instant, closes with Christ, and accepts of Him as his righteousness.

PROPOSITION IX.

Immediately hereon, God, the Judge, acquits the sinner personally sisted before Him, and receives him into favour, only on account of Christ and His righteousness imputed to him. This is what is properly called Justification; a doctrine which, being commonly discoursed of, need not be farther inquired into.

From what has been said, I draw the following inferences:

Inf. 1. This Justification properly so called, differs vastly from the absolution in heaven, formerly mentioned. For,

1. The former act did not reach the sinner himself;

but now he is personally acquitted, by an act of God terminated in his conscience.

2. In this sentence, the plea of law and justice against the sinner, which was managed in his conscience, is declared to be void, and abandoned for ever : so that no one ever can, by warrant from God, again insist against the justified sinner upon that charge, to his condemnation, or to the disturbance of his peace. I do not deny, that the litigious accuser of the brethren, together with the sinner's misinformed conscience, may abuse this, to give the poor creature trouble ; but in and by this sentence, there is a claimable defence, that justly may, and instantly should, be taken hold of, and pleaded for the relief of the conscience against all disturbances of this nature. This clears what is meant by being terminated in conscience.

3. By this sentence the sinner has immediate access to peace with God, and to his favour : though sometimes he cannot so soon recover himself from the alarm attending his former condition, as to be able at once to make use of it.

4. This sentence, although it is an act of God, is manifestly passed on earth, with direct and immediate respect to the sinner, sisted before God as aforesaid ; whereas all the former acts took place in heaven, and terminated on Christ our Head, as the Surety and Advocate for sinners.

Inf. 2. Although the complete mystical union between Christ and elect sinners, is not before faith ;

yet there are, before faith, several kinds of union, each of which has its own special use and influence. Nor is there here any danger of antinomianism. The most zealous opposers of antinomians grant all that I advance. Dr Williams in particular, expressly asserts all that I design ; and our divines do the same.

1. Christ and his people are one in the decree : which yet, says Witsius, infers nothing but that, in time, they shall be actually united.

2. They are one federally, or, as others express it, legally, by virtue of the Covenant of Redemption, wherein Christ is constituted Head of the elect, and Surety for them ; which yet infers no present alteration in their state, but leaves them as they are, until they are brought out of it in the order agreed upon in that transaction.

3. They are one in nature. Christ took part herein with the children, that as their near kinsman he might redeem them.

4. They are one really, (though, on the part of the children, but passively,) when the Spirit of Christ, in his name, takes possession of them, and unites them to Him. There are two bonds of union ; the Spirit on Christ's part, and faith on ours. The union must begin on his part. His taking hold of us, is the cause of our taking hold of him, and so must be first in order of nature. These things are not controverted ; yet they are of chief use, in the business in hand.

Inf. 3. The sinner's discharge advances by steps, some of which do precede faith.

1. There is that fundamental or general Justification, (as Charnock and Witsius call it,) when Christ was discharged. This is antecedent to Justification, in order of time.

2. There is that absolution in heaven, which we have cleared and confirmed above. This is antecedent to faith in order of nature, but not in time.

3. There is Justification, strictly and properly so called, which immediately follows faith.

IV. THE PRINCIPLES WHICH WERE MORE LARGELY LAID DOWN, EXPLAINED, AND CONFIRMED ABOVE, BRIEFLY SUMMED UP, AND PRESENTED TOGETHER, THAT THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE RESOLUTION OF THE FOREGOING DIFFICULTIES, MAY MORE CLEARLY APPEAR.

Prop. 1. In the Covenant of Redemption, Christ Jesus was, with his own consent, appointed Head, Surety, and Mediator, for those who were given to him by the Father; thereby obliging himself to make satisfaction to Divine justice in their stead, and to purchase for them complete redemption, with all saving blessings.

2. Immediately upon his performance, or engagement equivalent to performance, a right did result for the parties whom he represented: that is to say, it became righteous with God to give them, under the restriction to be just now mentioned, a right to, and possession of, all the blessings purchased for them.

3. These blessings were purchased *sub termino*;

that is, to be actually given out to the persons concerned, at a time and in an order which had been agreed upon between the Father and the Son, the contrivers and managers of this whole matter.

4. Immediately upon performance of what he had undertaken, Christ was discharged of his obligation, and personally instated in the possession of what had been promised. The right purchased for sinners, being safely lodged in the hand of God's righteousness and faithfulness, action was allowed to him, as their Trustee and Head, to sue for their personal investiture with right to the possession of all, at the time and in the order agreed upon.

5. When this term approaches, the sinner, at the instance of injured justice, is summoned before God's tribunal on earth ; where, by the Word and Spirit, God the Judge is presented to him, in his majesty and holiness ; and here, before God, he is charged, convicted, and silenced.

6. The term being now come, the Lord Jesus Christ, the vigilant and faithful advocate, fully knowing that the poor sinner, who is now arraigned and duly convicted before God's tribunal on earth, cannot obtain an orderly discharge, but upon a plea wherein he is really and actually interested, and his interest evinced before the Judge, in that court where he now stands personally sisted ; moves his action on behalf of the sinner, before the same Judge, in the higher court ; the holiest, into which he is now entered with his own blood.

7. This action of the blessed Advocate, is admitted, his plea is sustained, and sentence passed accordingly. The first or immediate effect of this sentence, is not the sinner's discharge ; but, as preparatory to it, the present out-giving of what is necessary to instate him in an actual and actionable plea, and enable him to put in an orderly claim for a discharge, in the court where he is now arraigned : that is, the sending of the Spirit, to work regeneration, and thereby enable him to accept of Christ, as he is freely offered in the gospel.

8. Although the sustaining of Christ's action in the higher court, (which is called *absolution in heaven*,) does not, of itself, liberate the sinner immediately, yet it has the following effects : the curse of the law, having been borne by Christ for the sinner, cannot now be alleged against the out-giving and conferring of the Spirit of grace, or of faith in particular : the purchased blessings, being now demanded for the sinner, are instantly ordered, as what cannot, of right, be refused ; and the Holy Spirit, immediately taking possession of the poor sinner in Christ's name, and working faith, both in principle and act, enables him, and causes him, to believe. Thus the mystical union to Christ, begun by the Spirit's entrance, is now completed by faith's closing with Christ, and making Him its plea.

9. Immediately hereon, God justifies the sinner by an act terminating in his conscience, or on himself personally considered ; freeing him from all righteous

pursuit upon the former charge, constituting him free, accepting him into favour, and allowing him to plead this acquittance against all accusations. Romans viii. 33, 34.

V. APPLICATION OF THE FOREGOING PRINCIPLES, TO THE SOLUTION OF THE DIFFICULTIES STATED AT THE BEGINNING.

If I had not aimed at a full and satisfactory clearing of the difficulties, short answers might have served for most of them : but the way being now prepared, I shall answer them particularly.

Objection 1. How is it consistent with the wisdom and righteousness of God, to impart his image to a sinner who is yet under the curse? For it is manifest that, in the sight of God, he is to be considered so until he is justified.

Answer 1. They who hold the opposite opinion, such of them at least as we have principally in view, are burdened with the same difficulty. The act of faith by which a sinner is justified, being an effect of special grace wrought in the soul, antecedently, in order of nature, to justification ; how can God send his Spirit to work faith in a sinner yet under the curse?

2. Granting what has been stated above, of the claim put in by the blessed Intercessor, and God's admitting it, there is no difficulty in conceiving that he should give out what is necessary for instating

the sinner in the actual right to full and personal absolution. In so doing, he doth indeed look on the sinner as yet under the curse ; but withal, as one for whom that curse was borne, and for whom the grace was purchased, that is necessary to his obtaining a personal and plenary discharge.

Obj. 2. That a soul, yet under the wrath and curse of God, should be dignified with his image, or that one dignified with his image, should be under the curse, appears to be inconsistent with the nature of the things themselves, and the order to which it leads. First wrath should be removed, then a right given, and then privileges.

Ans. 1. There would be some difficulty here, if matters continued so for some time : but all taking place at the same time, it is scarcely worth while to debate it.

2. Allowing it to be absurd to imagine, that one simply under the curse, should be dignified with the image of God ; yet there is no absurdity in conceiving that a sinner, for whom satisfaction has been made and accepted, should be thus dignified, in order to enable him, at that very instant, to put in a claim for a personal and plenary discharge.

3. The first result of Christ's death, being the satisfaction of divine justice for our offences, the order of things, according to our way of conceiving, is hereby sufficiently secured ; inasmuch as no blessing is imparted, but upon satisfaction previously made. As to the order of investing the persons with a right to the

privileges, and putting them in possession, we must allow God to be the best judge.

Obj. 3. This makes the object of God's justifying act, to be a renewed saint, and not an ungodly sinner, according to Rom. iv. 5 ; and consequently, the offer of remission is to saints, and not to sinners. This objection being much insisted on by some, we shall consider it the more largely.

Ans. 1. In the Word of God, no man is termed righteous or unrighteous, godly or ungodly, merely on account of habitual righteousness. These denominations always respect *acts*. "He that *doeth* righteousness is righteous," 1 John iii. 7. Now, at the instant of justification, the person justified is one whose former acts have all been ungodly ; and who, antecedently to his justification, has done no works of righteousness.

2. The expression ungodly, being here used with respect to justification, must be taken in the sense that relates to the business in hand : wherefore he is to be deemed ungodly, who has no godliness that can be admitted by the Judge, as a ground of justification. In the eye of the law, and as to this business, have what he may, he *is* ungodly. Here, then, and in a law sense, he is ungodly ; having no plea, but standing convicted, with his mouth stopped.

3. According to the foregoing scheme, the sinner can have no eye to any thing in himself, either habitual or actual, as contributing to his justification. For, habitual grace is not discernible in itself ; it is

seen in its actings only. There is no act of grace previous, in any instant of time, to justifying faith ; and at that very instant he is justified. Whence it is manifest, that until he is justified, he can discern no grace in himself, and so can lay no stress on any.

4. Hence it is evident, that saving faith is the outgoing of the soul to Christ for righteousness, in a poor sinner who is convicted of ungodliness, who sees nothing in himself but sin and guilt, and is fully satisfied that if God enter into judgment with him, he cannot stand ; that he has no godliness, no acts of righteousness, that can be admitted ; much less a complete righteousness ; yea, that, on the contrary, he is all guilt, sin, and defilement.

5. Nor can the Judge, in pronouncing sentence of justification, have regard to any holiness in the sinner. The renovation being but in part, habitual righteousness will not answer the rule ; and as for acts, the sinner has none. Wherefore, on that ground, the Judge must legally find him ungodly, and condemn him.

6. When God is said to justify the ungodly, the expression is not to be restricted to one precise action, as the sound of the word seems to import. All agree that it includes the imputation of Christ's righteousness, as well as the act of acquittance that follows thereon : and that imputation, as has been cleared above, is, in order of nature, before both faith and regeneration.

7. From all this it is evident, that the foregoing

principles give no ground for ministers to warn their people against venturing to betake themselves by faith to Christ's righteousness, until they see such qualifications in themselves as regeneration, repentance, and the like : a danger of which the movers of this objection seem very apprehensive ; and, to avoid which, some of them have used expressions obnoxious enough to misconstruction. The minister, in dealing with a convinced sinner, is not to bid him look inward, and to tell him that if he finds not there that he is regenerated, and truly repents, he is not warranted to expect justification, or to go to Christ for it. Such an enquiry before justification, is preposterous and vain. On such terms it is impossible ever to believe. But he ought, like the apostle in the 16th of the Acts, directly to press, " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ;" and the sinner, like the poor jailor, without any such previous enquiry for qualifications in himself, should directly grip* to Christ for righteousness, as one altogether lost in himself, and destitute of any qualifications that can avail him. And this is quite consistent with the duty of ministers to press conversion, repentance, and faith, at the same time, as Scripture precepts and examples require ; and that, without troubling themselves or their people with the disputes about the priority or posteriority of these in order of nature, while it is agreed that they all take

* This expressive Scotch word has no equivalent in English. Jamieson explains it by a circumlocution ; 1. To take forcible possession of. 2. To catch, or lay hold of, after pursuit.—ED.

place at the same time. Hundreds have successfully preached the gospel, and many more have received it, without ever concerning themselves in these questions. See Isaiah lv. 7. Mark i. 14. 15. Acts iii. 19. Acts v. 31. Acts xxvi. 18.

Ob: 4. How can the soul be partaker of spiritual life, before its union with Christ, the fountain of life? Union is by faith, whereby we come to Christ for life. But this appears to be unnecessary, if we have life before union.

Ans. 1. There are several kinds of union, before complete mystical union, as we have already cleared. As to this, orthodox divines, not excepting the most zealous opposers of antinomianism, do agree. Each of these unions is attended with special advantageous influences to the elect.

2. To answer more closely: the passive union described above, being brought about by the Spirit of Christ, in taking possession of the soul and working a vital principle, must, in order of nature, precede all acts of ours. Union must begin on his part. The first uniting act belongs to the living principle. The soul enters into the body and quickens it; and the body, by life derived from the soul, cleaves to the soul again. Just so, Christ the head, by his Spirit, first quickens the dead sinner; and then the sinner, thus quickened, doth, by this derived life, cleave unto Christ.

3. Hence it is evident, that the sinner hath no life but on Christ's account; and that what life he hath, is derived from Christ.

4. The sinner receiveth no life *actively*, until he comes to Christ by faith, and is engrafted into him.

5. The sinner, on coming to Christ, receives the life of justification. As he that is condemned may be said to lose his life, so he that is absolved, especially if he deserve to die, may be said to receive his life.

6. It is by faith that we receive the life of sanctification. By the first exercise of faith, in coming to Christ and closing with him, and by the view which the soul then gets of him, the principle of life, which had been formed in the soul, is quickened and enlivened, and grace is drawn forth into action. Till that view of Christ is obtained, all lies, as it were, dead. By the continued exercise of faith, the daily supplies of grace are conveyed, whereby the life of sanctification is carried on. Thus it is between the vine stock and the ingrafted branch. The stock sends up quickening influences to the graft. The branch, thus enlivened, cleaves to the stock ; and the union being completed, and all the channels of conveyance opened, life in abundance is sent from the root ; whereby the branch putteth forth leaves, flowers, and fruit, each in its place and season.

7. The life of comfort, which is the life of life, is received and maintained wholly by faith. There is no comfort, but by faith.

8. Eternal life, both in right and in possession, is by faith.

Obj. 5. Does not this make the conferring of the

Spirit, antecedent to faith ? while yet it is by faith that we receive the Spirit, Gal. iii. 14.

Ans. 1. The Spirit is received *passively*, to make us lively stones, and to build us up “a spiritual house, an habitation of God through the Spirit :” and we being thus prepared, receive him by faith *actively*, to dwell in us, and to act in us as occasion may require.

2. They who choose the other side of the question, must allow that the Spirit is given to work faith ; and so fall under their own objection.

Obj. 6. Does not this suppose that the heart is purified before faith ; contrary to Acts xv. 9, which teaches that the heart is purified by faith ?

Ans. 1. Faith itself, as Dr Owen well observes, is a principal part of the restored image of God ; and so, of our purity. The same objection may be applied to the other parts of the divine image.

2. What the Spirit of God begins in renovation, is progressively carried on through the exercise of faith, drawing purifying virtue from Christ : and this is the intent of the text.

Obj. 7. Is not the new creature begotten by the immortal seed of the Word ? Are we not born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever ? 1 Peter i. 23. And can the Word operate in any other way, than through the intervention of faith ? The Word profiteth not but as it is received by faith, wherefore faith must be antecedent to the new nature.

Ans. 1. Not to take any advantage from the clause which fixes the sense of the Word, in the text referred to, I ask: Since faith cometh by hearing the Word of God (Rom. x. 17), and the Word can have no influence but by faith, must not faith be before faith? The argument is the same.

2. The plain intent of such words, in these and similar cases, is this: that while, in the gospel dispensation, the Word is objectively proposed, and the mind conversant about it, the Spirit of the Lord, using it as the instrument, means, or channel of his influences, worketh faith, and so begetteth or formeth the new creature.



ESSAY III.

*AN ENQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF
GOD'S ACT OF JUSTIFICATION.*



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AN ENQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF GOD'S ACT OF JUSTIFICATION.

THAT the word Justification, as it relates to the acquitment of a sinner, is to be understood in a forensic or law sense, as a juridical act, whereby God, as Judge, upon the righteousness of Christ, doth acquit the sinner, and receive him into favour ; is generally agreed among orthodox divines. Now whereas it is certain, that the sinner is really sisted at God's tribunal, and there accused by the law, conscience, and Satan ; and no less clear, that upon his believing, he is acquitted by a sentence passed in his favour, and so is justified ; it may hereon be modestly enquired, how God giveth out sentence in favour of the sinner. These things are not visibly transacted ; nor is the sentence audibly pronounced by any particular form of words, in the hearing of the sinner arraigned, much less in the hearing of bystanders. The question then is, What is that act of God ? Or how does he express that act absolvatory ?

This question being, so far as I know, but rarely and sparingly touched by our divines, much modesty

and sobriety are necessary in the determination of it. Yet some having delivered their opinions, I hope it will be no presumption to enquire a little into the subject ; provided always that there be no attempt to be wise above what is written ; against which, with the help of God, I will endeavour to guard.

I find that, among divines, there are different apprehensions of this matter.

I. Some distinguish between sentential and constitutive Justification. The sinner, say they, immediately upon his believing, is constitutively justified by the gospel law, Rom. v. 19 ; and sententially justified, when the Judge, at the day of judgment, passeth sentence upon him, acquitting him, according to the said law. Thus Mr Truman expressly delivers himself ; flatly denying any act of God, as Judge, acquitting any particular person in time ; and admitting no act of God but that which is rectoral or legislative, in the constitution of the new law of grace. This opinion, however dogmatically delivered as clear and unquestionable, I must confess, does not satisfy me ; for the following reasons :

1. The Scripture representation of the state of the sinner at the time when he is justified, seems unavoidably to require the interposition of some act of God, applicative of the law, rule, or promise, (call it which you please ; of that I dispute not now,) to the sinner, now personally attacked, convened before the Judge, accused and convicted. How such a one can be free, without the interposition of the Judge on his

behalf, I know not ; nor does it seem very intelligible. The sinner's own pleading of the constitution or law, will not end the dispute between him and his accusers, if the Judge be silent ; as it never does in the like cases among men.

2. Justification is expressly said to be the act of God, Rom. viii. 33 ; and we read of God's forgiving sin now, or at a definite time, and not before ; which cannot easily be reconciled to that opinion. I doubt whether the Scripture, designing to set forth such an act of God, could use terms more significant to this purpose, than those which it has made use of.

3. That opinion seems entirely to deny sentential justification : for as to that justification (which is commonly so called) at the last day, it is altogether different from that which the Scripture speaks of, under the name of justification before God. The Judge, the state of the persons, the ground and design of the procedure, are altogether different. See Dr Owen on Justification, pp. 223, 224, 225.* “A very few words will free our enquiry from any concern in that which is called Sentential Justification at the day of Judgment. For, of what nature soever it be, the person concerning whom that sentence is pronounced, was actually and completely justified before God in this world, and made partaker of all the benefits of that Justification, even to a blessed resurrection in glory: 1 Cor. xv. 43. The souls of the most will, long before, have enjoyed a blessed rest

* This important passage is here quoted at length.—ED.

with God ; absolutely discharged and acquitted from all their sins and all their labours. There remaineth nothing but an actual admission of the whole person into eternal glory. Wherefore, this judgment can be no more but declaratory, to the glory of God, and the everlasting refreshment of believers. And without reducing it to a new Justification, which it is nowhere called in Scripture, the ends of that solemn judgment are sufficiently apparent : the manifestation of the wisdom and righteousness of God, in appointing the way of salvation by Christ, as well as in the giving of the law ; the public conviction of them by whom the law hath been transgressed and the gospel despised ; the vindication of the righteousness, power, and wisdom of God, in ruling the world by his providence, wherein, for the most part, his paths, unto all in this life, are in the deep, and his footsteps are not known ; the glory and honour of Jesus Christ, triumphing over all his enemies, then fully made his footstool ; and the glorious exaltation of grace in all that do believe ; with sundry other things of a like tendency to the ultimate manifestation of divine glory, in the creation and guidance of all things.

“Hence it appears how little force there is in that argument which some pretend to be of so great weight in this cause. As every one (they say) shall be judged of God at the last day, in the same way and manner, or on the same grounds, is he justified of God in this life. But by works, and not by faith alone, every one shall be judged at the last day.

Wherefore, by works, and not by faith alone, every one is justified before God in this life. For,

“1. It is nowhere said that we shall be judged, at the last day, *ex operibus*; but only, that God will render unto men, *secundum opera*: being justified freely by his grace, and not according to the works of righteousness which we have done. And we are everywhere said to be justified in this life, *ex fide*, *per fidem*; but nowhere *propter fidem*, or *secundum fidem*: or God is said to justify us by faith, but not for our faith, or according to our faith. And we are not to depart from the expressions of Scripture, where such a difference is constantly observed.

“2. It is somewhat strange, to assert that men shall be judged at the last day, and justified in this life, just in the same way and manner with respect to faith and works; when the Scripture doth constantly ascribe our justification before God, unto faith without works; and the judgment at the last day is said to be according unto works, without any mention of faith.

“3. If Justification and eternal Judgment proceed absolutely on the same grounds, reasons, and causes; then, if men had not done what they shall be condemned for doing, at the last day, they should have been justified in this life. But many shall be condemned for sins against the light of nature only; as never having had the written law or gospel made known unto them. Wherefore, unto such persons, to abstain from sins against the light of nature, would be

sufficient unto their justification, without any knowledge of Christ or the gospel : Rom. ii. 12.

“4. This proposition, ‘God pardons men their sins, and gives them the adoption of children, with a right unto the heavenly inheritance, according to their works,’ is not only foreign to the gospel, but contrary to it, and destructive of it ; being contrary to all express testimonies of Scripture where these things are spoken of, both in the Old Testament and the New. But that God judgeth all men, and rendereth unto all men, at the last judgment, according to their works, is true, and affirmed in the Scripture.

“5. In our justification by faith, in this life, Christ is considered as our Propitiation and Advocate ; as he who hath made atonement for sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. But at the last day, and in the last judgment, he is considered only as the Judge.

“6. The end of God in our justification, is the glory of his Grace : Eph. i. 6. But the end of God in the last Judgment, is the glory of his renumerative Righteousness : 2 Tim. iv. 8.

“7. The representation that is made of the final Judgment, in Matthew chapters vii. and xxv., is only of the visible Church : and therein, the plea of faith, as to the profession of it, is common to all, and is equally made by all. Upon that plea of faith, it is put to the trial, whether it was sincere true faith, or only that which is dead and barren. This trial is made, solely by the fruits and effects of it : and, in the public declaration of things unto all, it cannot be

made otherwise. In no other way, doth the faith whereby we are justified, come into judgment at the last day. See John v. 24, with Mark xvi. 16." So far Dr Owen.

4. The Reformed Churches, in their Confessions, seem harmoniously agreed in this ; that Justification is an act of God, applicative of the gospel to the sinner's actual relief, upon his believing, and at the time of it. This, it is probable, would not have much weight with Mr Truman, were he alive ; who not only dissents, without difficulty, from the Reformed Churches, but is bold to charge them with talking not very intelligibly, if consistently with themselves. But however, this will have its weight with sober spirits.

II. Others there are, who, besides that Justification in which a sinner, upon his believing, is constitutively justified by the gospel law or promise, (whereby it is provided that the believer shall be justified,) are willing to admit of another act of God at the time of believing, viz., an immanent act, by which God acquits the believer in his own mind. So Mr Ferguson, in his elegant discourse upon Justification. But neither can I grant that this fully satisfies : for

I. The immanent acts of God are all eternal, and are not distinct from God himself, as our divines generally agree. But this act of Justification takes place, at the time of believing, and not before it ; and has an effect without him ; terminating on the sinner, and making a relative change.

2. An immanent act does not answer the end of Justification, or come up to the Scripture account of it, which makes it to terminate in conscience, and free the sinner from any just impeachment or accusation upon the grounds whereon he was formerly impleaded and pursued.

III. Others there are, who seem to conceive that this act of God's grace in justifying a sinner, consists in, or rather is, His powerful application, or setting home, of the word of promise, immediately upon the sinner's first believing on, or accepting of, the Lord Jesus. For confirming this, several things may be alleged, not without some countenance from the Word ; as,

1. This act of God, is unquestionably an act of grace.

2. The word of promise, is the channel, or means, whereby all the grace of the covenant, of what kind soever, is conveyed to us.

3. It is not the bare letter of the promise, but it is the promise as used by the Spirit of God, (to whom belongs the application of saving blessings,) that doth effect this conveyance; whether the grace or privilege be in its own nature real, a work of grace wrought in the soul of the sinner; or only relative, such as acquitment, and the change thereby made, unquestionably are. The meaning is plainly and shortly this. The Spirit of God, by the promises of inherent grace, produces inherent and real effects, such as holy dispositions, holy affections, &c. The

same Spirit, by the promises of relative grace, and the application of them to the soul, effects a relative change; or produces effects which, merely to distinguish them from real and inherent, I may call moral or relative: such as acquitment from condemnation, right to the favour of God, and privileges of children.

4. It is agreed among those who are sound, that at first believing, there is given, by the Spirit of the Lord, a clear discovery of Christ Jesus, as held forth in the Word; whereby the soul, convinced of sin, is effectually determined to close with him, as the only way of relief: and this act of the soul, is now generally thought to be the justifying act of faith.

5. It must also be granted, that at the same time, or immediately afterward, there follows some discovery of the safety and security of the soul's eternal concerns, in adherence to this way. That there is some such apprehension, is evident from this one thing; that from the first moment of believing, the most discouraged soul, at its worst condition, cannot think of giving up its interest in this way, upon any terms. This cannot be accounted for, but by supposing, that amidst all its shakings, there is some trust, expectation, or hope of salvation, in this way.

6. The ground of this hope, trust, or expectation, certainly is the promise of God, cleared or set home by the Spirit of God, at the soul's first closing with Christ. And this act of God, setting home the promise to the believer as a ground of trust, (which,

as was noted above, always does in some sort relieve), I take to be the justifying act of God.

If I should stop here, what has been said would appear too dark and perplexed ; and, with many, would fail to give a due understanding of the opinion which I have expressed : much less would it suffice to establish the truth of it, or to answer objections. I shall therefore endeavour to give a clear and distinct account of my own thoughts on this subject ; remarking, that for the main, they fall in with this opinion, which has been but obscurely proposed, being gathered from dark hints in writing and conversation.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS LAID DOWN, FOR CLEARING THE
WAY TO THE SOLUTION OF THIS QUESTION.

In order to a distinct conception of this matter, the following observations should be carefully attended to.

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, has some special influence, of what kind soever it be, in our Justification before God. This is clearly evinced by the constant use of those expressions, that we are justified by faith, or through faith : while the like expressions are not used with respect to any other grace or duty. See Owen on Justification, p. 148, &c.

2. The subject of this justifying faith, is a sinner, cited to, and sisted at, the tribunal of God, convicted of guilt, destitute of any valid defence in himself, and, in a word, put to silence before God. No other is capable of this faith, immediately.

3. The object of this faith, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, as the ordinance of God, in his work of mediation, for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners; and as proposed unto that end, in the promise of the gospel. He that would see this fully confirmed and explained, may consult the judicious Dr Owen's *Treatise of Justification*, chapters i., ii., iii.

4 The acts of faith, in reference to this object, required of convinced sinners, and comprised under the general name of believing in him, are three: assent, consent, and reliance.

ASSENT.

4: 1. Assent unto the truths concerning Christ, his nature, his person, and offices; viz: that he is God manifested in the flesh; that he is the person whom God, of his mercy to sinners, chose, and sent into the world, to recover them; that he is the only mediator between God and sinners; that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God through him; &c. The object of this assent, is the revelation of those truths in the Word of promise.

CONSENT.

4: 2. Consent, or the receiving act of faith; whereby we accept of Christ, or receive Christ; John i. 12. As to this, we are distinctly to observe these things:

4: 2, 1. It is obvious that this receiving of Christ, not being capable of the natural or vulgar sense of the word as it is applied to things external, must be

taken in a moral sense. Being thus taken, it supposes an act of the mind or judgment, approving of Christ as meet for the purpose for which he is proposed ; and it formally and directly imports the will's consent and complacency, in closing with him as such. The mind seeing in him all that can be desired with respect to the sinner's present case, the will closes with him ; satisfied that he is such a one as the sinner wants.

4: 2, 2. This consent or approbation, more fully considered, as applied in practice, includes in it a renunciation of all other means pretending any usefulness to the same end, and standing in opposition to Christ, or coming in competition with Christ, as thus proposed ; a deliberate judgment, that Christ alone is, in all respects, fitted and designed for that work ; together with a satisfaction of mind, and complacency in him as such ; and an acquiescence, or rest of mind in this consent : so that the soul is come to a point, that it has no other way to look ; and that if it has but him, it is safe.

This is that cleaving to the Lord, which some call trust or adherence ; and it respects the way, or consists in a fiducial confidence as to the safety of the way. The object of this act of consent or approbation, is properly the goodness, suitableness, and excellency of Christ, as the means of recovery for lost sinners.*

* On this act of adherence, there follows trust, expectation, or fiducial confidence as to the event ; and this is what we judge to be posterior to Justification.

RELIANCE.

4: 3. Reliance. The foregoing acts of faith are followed by another, commonly called the fiducial act, or trust; whereby the soul, in expectation and confidence of relief by Christ, rolls itself upon him. This may be understood two ways: either more generally, that the soul, seeing as above, the vanity of other ways, and the safety of this, dares not build expectation any where else, but looks to this as the only door at which relief can come in; or, more particularly, as a confident expectation of its own salvation in particular, through Jesus Christ. If the former only be intended, it differs not from the acquiescence above mentioned: if the latter, to wit, a confidence or trust that we shall be relieved; whether it be more faint or more vigorous, it is indeed, where the other two acts precede, a distinct act of faith. As to this last act I shall only observe, that the ground of it is the promise, or engagement of the faithfulness of God, for the salvation of believers; and that, as specially applied by God to the sinner, and the application discerned by him. This is of great moment for clearing the point in hand; and shall be afterwards further insisted on.

5. It is disputed, which of these three acts is the justifying act of faith: that is, the act whereon justification doth immediately and necessarily ensue; and with respect to which, we are said in Scripture to be justified by faith.

The papists generally, and some of our divines particularly, (as Camero,) place it in assent. Of this I shall only say, that if it be not so explained, as really to fall in with one or other of the opinions after mentioned, it runs counter to Scripture. As to this, our divines who have written against the papists, may be consulted.

Others place it in the fiducial act, or reliance. Of these, some, understanding the fiducial act more generally, do, in effect, differ but in words from those who make the second to be the justifying act.

Others, among whom were many of our first Reformers, seem at least, to make the fiducial act strictly so called, to be the justifying act of faith ; or a confidence, persuasion, or belief, that our sins are forgiven. Now it is obviously no man's duty to believe this, but upon supposition that he is antecedently justified by faith. See Owen, p. 138. *Shepard's Sound Believer*, pp. 196, 197, &c. Wherefore, others do place it in the second act, which is thus described by Dr Owen : "The heart's approbation of the way of Justification and salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ, proposed in the gospel, as proceeding from the grace, wisdom, and love of God ; with its acquiescence therein as to its own condition." This acquiescence is not a persuasion of its own salvation in particular, but is to be understood as above explained. The confirmation and explanation of this, may be found in the place above referred to ; and in the writings of our divines, practical and polemical,

who generally embrace this opinion : and with them I agree. Mastricht, pages 53, 55.

6. As soon then as the soul, by a discovery of Christ Jesus, in the light of the Lord, conveyed to it in and by the gospel, is brought to this approbation of him, Justification, or the act of God acquitting him, doth immediately ensue. And as to this act, the question is, wherein doth it consist? By what means is it expressed? or how does God pronounce this sentence? For clearing this question upon the foregoing principles, we observe farther :

7. That the fiducial act, or the trust above mentioned, although it is not the justifying act, but, in order of nature, consequent thereto, doth, in a greater or less degree, necessarily accompany, and immediately follow upon, the foregoing acts of faith, at the same instant of time. I do not mean, that the believing soul, at first closing with Christ, always hath so steady and full a persuasion that its sins are forgiven and its salvation secured, as that it dares boldly to pronounce and speak out so much to others, or even to assert it resolutely within itself : nor do I mean, that it hath so clear a view of its own graces, that by reflecting on them, it can confidently conclude its election, justification, and certain salvation.* But what I mean is

* To these two kinds of persuasion, the one built upon reflection, (under the influence of the Spirit of grace,) upon our own graces, enabling us to discern them, and to conclude from them our interest in Christ ; the other grounded upon a word of promise, powerfully set home by the Spirit of God, (such as,

this : that to a convinced sinner, pursued by the law, conscience, and Satan, the first saving manifestation of Christ, determining the soul to close with him in the manner above mentioned, is immediately followed by such an expectation, trust, and humble confidence, as engages the soul, ever after, to follow the Lord in a way of duty, without despairing of a saving issue : yea, not without a secret hope, (though, in times of temptation, this hope is afterwards variously clouded,) that in due time it shall obtain a merciful issue. This persuasion and humble confidence, is really particular as to the sinner himself, and his own salvation ; although, through the humbling impressions which he has of himself at the time, his own guilt, and the awe of God which is upon his spirit, he is afraid to express it directly and particularly of himself.

For confirming this, I shall only hint the few following things.

7. 1. That which is set before the eye of the soul at first believing, namely, a discovery, in a supernatural light, of the glory of God's grace, mercy, and love, to sinners, in Christ Jesus, especially considering what the circumstances of the poor sinner at present are, cannot possibly be supposed to have a less effect.

7. 2. This discovery, without which believing is impossible, must, in some measure, relieve the soul ; for that is the very design of it. Now, this persuasion, as we have stated it, is the least that can be supposed
Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee ;) most part do restrict, (how justly, I enquire not now,) the notion of assurance.

in this matter. Without something of this, the soul is, in effect, as it was before.

7. 3. The experience and confession of those who have distinctly observed what passed in their own souls at the time, together with instances from the Word of God, confirm this.

7. 4. When poor believers, disquieted through the power of temptation and confusion of mind, deny any such persuasion or confidence, yet, by its effects, it is evident to others that they have it. Doth not their resolute adherence to duty in spite of all discouragements, and their refusing to quit their claim, or to try other ways suggested to them, plainly bewray some such secret persuasion?

7. 5. To add no more; the placing of the essence of faith in assurance, by our gravest and most experienced divines, seems to intimate, that they were generally persuaded that this, at least, is inseparable from justification: and if they meant no more, their opinion will, upon the strictest trial, be found unexceptionable.

8. This humble persuasion, trust, confidence, or expectation, must be allowed to be, in believers, not a groundless presumption, but an act of faith; and if it be so, it must have some solid foundation.

9. The ground of this fiducial act, is certainly the word of promise, whereby God engages to pardon sinners, and accept them graciously, in Christ Jesus. This the Scriptures clear in many ways. In the gospel call, there is a revelation of Christ to be

assented to ; an offer or proposal of him, as worthy of all acceptation, to be accepted ; a command, requiring and warranting this acceptance ; and a promise of mercy or salvation to the acceptor. This last is the ground of this fiducial trust. Psalms cxix. 74, cxxx. 5.

10. Yet the word of promise, absolutely considered, is not, of itself, able or sufficient to draw forth this trust, without the special application of it to the soul. The promise must come, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost : 1 Thess. i. 5. God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into the soul ; and give that evidence of the faithfulness of his own engagement, which will prevail with the soul to lay stress upon it.

11. Hence it appears evident, that there is an act of God, manifesting his faithfulness in the promise ; clearly holding forth and powerfully applying his promised mercy, for the relief of the sinner, now looking to the Lord Jesus, and approving of him as the only way of acceptance.

To prevent any mistake about this : when I say that God applies, I do not mean, (whatever he may do upon some occasions,) that he speaks in the way of an absolute promise or assertion, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." But what I mean is this ; that when the poor trembling convinced sinner is, by a clear manifestation of the Mediator, prevailed on to renounce all other ways of relief, and turn his eye toward him, as alone worthy of acceptation, and available to poor sinners in his case ; at that very

instant, though consequent in order of nature, there is, 1. a shining discovery of mercy, of which the sinner had no sight before in that way : 2. this mercy is particularly held forth to the poor sinner for his relief ; it is set in his eye as suitable to his present case : and 3. the promise and engagement of God are enforced upon his soul, "Thou shalt be saved ;" that is, saving mercy is presently tendered to the poor trembling sinner.

Now although the sinner, not yet recovered from the alarm into which he had been cast, immediately before, by the discovery of his misery, dares not always go presently into particular and applicative conclusions ; yet this gracious intimation begets somewhat of a humble confidence ; and, for the time at least, breaks the force of the oppressing and confounding charge under which he lay.

12. The act of God above described, may, I conceive, be called, and justly considered to be, his justifying act, or act of acquitment. To clear this a little, observe the following particulars :—

12. 1. All these things taking place at the same instant, their close connexion as to time, unavoidably occasions some difficulty in the conception, observation, and expression, of the several distinct acts, either of God, or of our own minds. And this difficulty is increased, by the sinner's alarm before the gospel manifestation, and his surprise under the manifestation itself.

12. 2. It is clear, and agreed among sound divines,

(for we concern not ourselves, at present, with others,) that there are, at first, such distinct actings of faith; that each of them hath its proper foundation; and that the ground of the whole, is the saving manifestation of God's mercy in the promise, through Jesus Christ.'

12. 3. From what has been said it is evident, that there is such an act of God, holding forth mercy and favour, in and by the promise, to the soul, while its eye is fixed upon the Lord Jesus, in the way described above. I need not stand to confirm this farther. If it be denied, there neither is, nor can be, any ground sufficient to produce or support the trust which I have spoken of.

12. 4. That this is an act of acquitment, appears thus. The sinner is now at the tribunal of God, beat from all his pleas, and ready to sink under the weight of a heavy charge. At this very instant, the gospel discovery, seasonably presenting the Lord Jesus to view, the eye of the soul is turned wholly toward him. While he looks to that quarter alone for relief, God irradiates the soul by a sweet manifestation of his mercy through Christ to sinners, in the promise. This discovery, made at such a time to the sinner whose case is now depending, and who is, as it were, a prisoner at the bar, imports no less than an intimation of the judge's mind as to the case: namely an acquitment from the charge: instead of a sentence of condemnation, or a discovery and application, to the sinner's conscience, of wrath and the curse; which, in these circumstances, would quite overwhelm him.

12. 5. This act is sufficient to all the ends and purposes of an act of Justification. For,

12. 5. 1. It repels the force of the charge ; and although it doth not presently cure all the accidental consequences of the sinner's former case, yet it is found in experience, that this discovery, at the season of it, always frees the soul from the confounding dread and despondency under which it lay before.

12. 5. 2. It lays the sinner under an endearing and everlasting obligation to the kindness of God ; the sense of which, though it may at times be weakened by various occurrences, is never entirely lost.

12. 5. 3. From this time forward, the sinner hath, if not at all times to his own discerning, yet really, and oft-times to the discerning of others, a liberty of spirit from his former discouraging dread of God ; and somewhat, if I may not say of confidence, yet of kindly freedom, in his dealings with God.

12. 5. 4. This act of God, not only gives a right to freedom from all righteous pursuit of the charge that was so lately managed against the sinner in his own conscience ; (which, I acknowledge, results, *ipso iure*, from the promise, at the instant of believing ;) but it doth moreover apply this right, declaratively, and juridically ; and giveth him a ground on which he justly may and should claim it, insist upon it, and employ it against all attempts to revive the old process.

12. 5. 5. After this, none may or can, by warrant and authority from God, and in his name, righteously insist against the sinner for his life.

12. 5. 6. When God, for wise ends, permitteth Satan, the malicious accuser, to wake the pursuit, and importunately to vex the sinner, there needeth no new or different sentence, to silence and repel him. If God, in his mercy, be pleased to grant a revival of the first discovery, (which is like an extract of the first sentence,) the soul is instantly quieted, and the enemy confounded.

12. 5. 7. Immediately upon this, God carries it toward the soul, as a reconciled God; and at first, for the most part discernibly: or if it be not discerned by the sinner, this flows rather from his own weakness, than from want of evidence. In a word; upon this discovery, the Judge appears divested, as it were, of his terrible majesty; the frowns are no more seen in his face, but a benign majesty, such as commands at once, kindly thoughts and respect. The panel is no more imprisoned and hampered, as before, by the fearful expectation of wrath and fiery indignation; the pursuers either entirely withdraw and disappear; or, if the litigious adversary persist, what is now done by Satan, or a misinformed conscience, is but like the malicious reclaiming of those who have met with a disappointment from the judge. And, to add no more, the poor man, with some pleasant freedom, goes his way, and falls to his work.

Might not God have justly required of every one of the sons of men, that act of faith, whereon, by a gracious promise, he has voluntarily obliged himself to justify sinners; although he had made no such promise?

If he had given a doctrinal revelation of Christ Jesus, and the way of salvation by him, without promising to justify any, or fixing any terms, but reserving these things wholly in his own mind; had not every sinner been obliged to assent to the revelation, to approve of it in his judgment, as the only expedient suitable to his case, and, renouncing all other ways, to turn his eyes to this; reckoning thus with himself: All my contrivances are vain; here, here is the only suitable expedient. Whether God will ever vouchsafe to save me, I cannot tell; he has kept that to himself; but if ever I am saved, this is the way: wherefore I will look this way, and let him do with me what he pleaseth. Justly may he set me aside; yet if I go elsewhere, it will assuredly be in vain. Here is a safe way; and who can tell but he may be gracious?

This, I think, has the acting of that faith which is justifying; or it is that acting of faith which is so.

THE END.

